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ABSTRACT

Most school writing required of students is done in artificial situations that have little resemblance to the writing demands people actually face. For this reason, students often fail to see the value of writing and thus produce writing that does not reflect their true ability to communicate. In a bilingual Los Angeles school serving students from low income Hispanic and Anglo backgrounds, a method was devised to make writing more meaningful. Students in grades two through four were asked to write letters each day to anyone in the school they chose. These letters were then distributed through a school "post office" system. Students were free to write in English or Spanish; the letters were not graded, or even read, by teachers; and students wrote whatever they wished. Letters written by 32 students were analyzed for three aspects of writing development: (1) the acquisition of the ability to write and respond to letters, (2) the purposes for which students wrote, and (3) the acquisition of the ability to take another's perspective. Results indicated that while the students were not becoming good writers instantly, they were developing fluency and learning that writing can be fun and rewarding. The findings contributed to theory and practice by showing the use of an effective instructional method and by enabling researchers to study samples produced in response to a real writing situation. (Extensive writing samples are included in the text.) (FL)

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THE NATURE AND DEVELOPMENT OF LETTER WRITING IN HISPANIC AND ANGLO CHILDREN USING A SCHOOL-BASED POSTAL SYSTEM

by
Jennifer E. Greene, PhD.

June, 1983

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Final Report
Project NIE-G-81-0119

by

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PART ONE: BACKGROUND FOR THE PROJECT

Jennifer: Of the different kinds of writing you do in your classroom, which do you like to do best?

Miguel: Colmar Mail.

Jennifer: What is special to you about doing Colmar Mail?

Miguel: You can talk to a person like that, in a silent way.

1.0 Introduction. Miguel has learned that writing can communicate his intentions to someone effectively, just as talking can. What Miguel knows about writing, as a fourth grader, is something too many children do not have the chance to learn before they decide that school writing is difficult, unpleasant, and not really good for anything personally meaningful anyway. Miguel is one of thirty-two second, third, and fourth graders who participated in my year long study of their use of a school-based postal system at Colmar Elementary School in Bell Gardens, California. He may be more articulate than some, but I do not think it is unreasonable to consider his point of view typical of the others'.

The purpose of this background part of the report is to establish two separable but closely related contexts which are necessary for an understanding of the project. The first pertains to the theory and research which guided me, and the second, to the nature of the operation of the postal system at Colmar. Section 1.1 discusses the theoretical rationale which motivated the study. Section 1.2 describes the design, development, and implementation of the postal system at Colmar, as well as its daily operation. Section 1.3 discusses my aims in selecting classrooms and students to participate in the project. Different styles of managing the postal system on the classroom level are described. Section 1.4 discusses data collection, both linguistic and ethnographic methods. Finally, Section 1.5 describes my basic approach to this research project and my aims in presenting my findings. It is clear throughout that the phenomenon I was investigating had a great deal of impact on my method of approaching it and the shape my report would take.

1.1 Theoretical Rationale. By the time children first enter school, they have accomplished the extremely complex task of acquiring proficiency in one, and often two or more languages. Their linguistic knowledge encompasses not only structural rules of how to create grammatical utterances, but also social rules of language use, the understanding of what is appropriate to say to whom on what occasions. Recent research on literacy development (eg., Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz, 1981) points to the importance of allowing children to draw on their rich oral language tradition as they make the transition to written literacy. Too often instructional methods do not make use of what children already know in the effort to move them into new areas of literacy development. In writing instruction, the focus is often on mechanical matters such as handwriting or spelling and rhetorical matters relating to formal content, with the result that children rarely have the opportunity to just "talk on paper" to grow comfortable with the medium. As Miguel described above, the postal system at Colmar provides students with precisely that opportunity.

From the point of view of an observant outsider looking in, it seemed that there were several important ways in which use of the postal system would allow children to draw on their oral language as they made the transition to literacy. First, in writing letters they could draw on the full range of language functions that is part of their oral language competence. When children talk, they invite, they insult, they apologize, they brag, they compliment, they complain, they ask, they inform, etc., etc. Typically, when they write in school, they are only asked to inform, one small piece of their oral language competence.

Second, it seemed that, like oral communication, communication in letters would be functional. That is, children would write letters in order to say real things to real people. What they wrote would be self-generated, rather than teacher-generated. It would be intended to accomplish communicative goals truly felt by children rather than external goals imposed by a teacher.

And, third, it seemed that communication in letters, like oral communication, would be interactive. Unlike most school writing tasks, which are designed for an unknown audience, children would write letters to a known recipient, and they would write with the expectation of a response.

The value of functional, interactive writing in writing development had been documented by Shuy (1981) and Staton (with Shuy and Kreeft, 1982) in the context of dialogue journals, where a teacher and a student write to one another on a daily basis. The postal system at Colmar provided another context, with somewhat different operational rules, in which to observe the effects of such writing. Some pilot work that I had done at Colmar during the 1980-1981 school year, (Greene, 1981) indicated that functional, interactive writing, which employed a range of language functions, was, indeed, being done. And it revealed some of the formal aspects involved as children learned to use the postal system.

The purpose of this study was to use linguistic and ethnographic methods to investigate two questions. First, I wanted to find ~~out~~ what children used the postal system for, what they wrote about and what language functions they employed. I wanted to know how the postal system entered into their personal, social, and academic lives. Second, I wanted to find out what was involved in learning to correspond, i.e., to interact with someone through the medium of writing. This seemed to me to be the essence of being able to use the postal system. I viewed learning to use the postal system as the acquisition of a cultural tool, in Vygotsky's (1978) sense. With the few changes involved in the transition from the Colmar postal system to the United States postal system, children were acquiring use of a tool that would be of value to them for the rest of their lives.

1.2 The Colmar Postal System. Understanding precisely what this tool was that Colmar students were learning to use requires a bit of explanation. As anyone who has been involved with successful educational innovation knows, implementation of the postal system at Colmar did not happen overnight. It started in a 2-3-4 bilingual classroom in another school in the Montebello Unified School District where an observant and clever teacher noticed that her students were writing a lot of notes to one another. She decided to try to channel some of that energy into her classroom writing program by establishing a postal center there. As she watched her students writing letters, she noticed such things as an increase in the amount of time her students spent writing, a desire on their part to send and receive letters, the ease with which they learned correct letter writing form. By answering all the letters she received, she found that she could model adult writing for them and facilitate their writing development.

Then, as often happens to good teachers, she was promoted out of the classroom, to the position of reading specialist at Colmar. During her first year there, she worked with many teachers, helping them set up language arts centers. In many classrooms, they started postal centers, with good results. It was at this point that she started thinking about the prospect of a school-wide postal system. She presented the idea to the Colmar staff, and the staff approved. She formed a committee consisting of a cross-section of teachers, and together they developed the groundwork for the Colmar Postal System. The committee presented its plan to the staff, and the plan was enthusiastically received. Using compensatory education funds, they printed stationery, stamps designed by the students, direction cards, and directories. Aides made mailboxes for each class and a big one for the library. Finally, the teachers set up their individual classroom centers, a central post office was established in the library, and the postal system was ready to go. Everyday a mail person from each class delivers mail to the central post office. Two fourth grade clerks go to the library at 10:00 a.m. to cancel (they had their own cancellation stamp made) and sort the mail. Then at 10:30, two deliverers go to the library, put on mail helmets, fill their mail bags, and deliver the mail.

So this is the school-level context in which letter writing happens at Colmar. At the time my study began, the postal system had been in operation successfully for two years. The reading specialist's leadership in the design, development, and implementation of the postal system, actively involving teachers every step of the way, was no doubt a large part of her success with the project. Winning a California School Boards award for innovative curriculum projects in 1982 helped to confirm the role of the postal system as an important institution at Colmar, and set an example for other schools to follow.

1.3 Choice of Classrooms and Students for Participation.

After becoming familiar with the operation of the postal system during my pilot work, I developed a plan for this project which involved working in four classrooms with a total of thirty-two students. I wanted four classrooms in order to be sure of having some variation in teacher management of the postal system. Explaining my method for selecting classrooms requires some information about how Colmar operates. Because of overcrowding, Colmar is on a year-round schedule. The school is divided into four "tracks" (the groupings have no relation to student ability), each of which is in session for nine weeks and then on vacation for three. It is a neighborhood school, with each "track" consisting of one quadrant of the neighborhood. Thus, the children who are in school together are also on vacation together, and it is among children on each "track" that most friendships tend to be. Because I knew from my pilot work that most letters are written between friends, I wanted the four classrooms I chose to be on a single "track." The "track" I chose had the most equal representation of second, third, and fourth graders. There were two 2-3 classrooms, one 3, and one 4.

In Mrs. F's classroom, one of the 2-3's, letter writing was a free time activity. She taught a lesson on letter form early in the year, but from then on (with the exception of class time taken to write to the Great Pumpkin and the Easter Bunny) students were on their own. Numerous times in my observations, I heard children requested to put their stationery away and to return to the task at hand. Letter writing was a popular activity there.

In Ms G's room, the other 2-3, the children were divided into four groups, and each group went to a post office center one, and sometimes two times a week. There, children were required to write one letter and allowed to write more if time permitted. Letter writing was also a free time activity.

In Ms R's classroom, the fourth grade, the postal system functioned much as it did in Ms G's room, as a weekly, or more frequent, center, and as a free time activity. A great deal of letter writing was done in Ms R's classroom.

In Mr. D's classroom, the third grade class, management of the postal system was more carefully monitored. Letter writing was taught as a whole class activity on a weekly basis. Mr. D was insistent upon correct spelling and form.

Other aspects of the teachers' behavior with respect to the postal system will emerge in the report, but it is worth mentioning at the outset that individual teacher's management style did not affect the nature of children's use of the postal system to any noticeable extent. Certain letter writing habits emerged in certain classrooms, but the variation seemed to be more a matter of peer than of teacher influence.

In choosing students to participate in the project, I made certain at the outset to have a reasonable balance according to grade level, English language fluency, academic ability (as determined by teacher judgement), and sex. The community of Bell Gardens is one of the poorer East Los Angeles suburbs. The population of the school is roughly seventy percent Hispanic, and of the thirty-two children whom I chose to work with, twenty-seven had Spanish surnames. Of these twenty-seven, twenty-three spoke Spanish as their first language and had learned English more or less recently, with somewhat varying degrees of fluency. All were, at the time of my selection, considered bilingual, although, in some cases, the degree to which they were bilingual seemed questionable to me. Four of the students with non-Hispanic surnames were Anglo, and one was Samoan, although his first language was English. Of the thirty-two students, eight were in the second grade, fourteen in the third, and ten in the fourth. All of the students whom I invited to participate in the project agreed to do so, and received parental permission.

1.4 Data Collection. Data collection involved collecting written samples for linguistic analysis, and ethnographic methods of observing and interviewing. I gave all the students in each of the four classrooms a manila envelope in which to store the letters they received. On the front of the envelope was taped a form on which to record the date, recipient, and school address of all the letters they wrote. On a monthly basis I collected the envelopes and copied the letters written by the students in the project which had been received since the previous collection. On a weekly basis, and sometimes more often because of a special event, I observed in the classrooms when letters were being written and when they were being distributed.

When I was in the classrooms I played the role of a helper, happy to assist with spelling (the usual "problem") or other matters pertaining to writing. My specific behavior was partially a product of the particular classroom I was in and that teacher's style of managing the postal system. I also observed the children when they were on the playground at recess, noting who played with whom and the kinds of talk I heard.

In June I interviewed the thirty-two students in order to better understand their feelings about the postal system and its usefulness for them. At that time I also interviewed the four teachers, to hear from them how they felt the postal system fit into their overall writing curriculum, and to discuss the students.

1.5 Data Reduction and Analysis. The essence of my purpose in presenting the results of my study is to document what children who are in the process of learning to write do when a school-wide postal system is part of their educational environment. I wanted the children to be real and to be allowed to reveal themselves through what they wrote, what they said to me, and what I observed about them. I view the complete set of written data I collected as a whole, representing the full range of ways second, third, and fourth graders at Colmar are likely to use the postal system. The children had the right of censorship, and for this and other reasons having to do with unavoidable slack in the collecting of letters, I am certain there are letters I did not see. But if the body of data I have is viewed as a whole, then each child represents some part of that whole. Of the complete range of concerns and language functions that appear in the letters, each child contributed one subset of them. Each child's subset may be slightly or, perhaps, markedly different from the others. I have noted the unusual, and focused my reporting on the more general.

I have not tried to fully portray each child. Rather, I have selected an illustrative set of letter writing strategies which, in my opinion, satisfactorily represents the whole. I have selected letters which illustrate clearly and interestingly the range of letter writing strategies I found. In this respect my methodolgy is more like the artist than the scientist doing qualitative educational research (Eizner, 1981). Rather than fully accounting for the whole by quantitative methods, I am allowing a part to represent the whole, knowing that the vitality that is so much a part of children's use of the postal system at Colmar will better shine through this way.

A story could have been told about each child, without question. But doing that was simply beyond the realm of possibility. There were a few cases, however, where it was impossible not to focus on one child at length, and in these instances a complete section is focused on a single child. Part Two draws from the complete set of data to demonstrate how children across the grade levels use the postal system. Part Three draws from a much smaller set of data to illustrate what is involved as children learn to correspond. Part Four suggests implications for education. The kinds of contributions a school-based postal system can make to children's writing development are discussed.

PART TWO: HOW CHILDREN USE THE POSTAL SYSTEM

2.0 Introduction. Any examination of how children use the postal system must, at least implicitly, also be concerned with their purposes in using it. That is to say, children's purposes for writing motivate and guide what they write. Purposes, however, are internal and, therefore, nonobservable. Children's concerns, on the other hand, that is, the things which they consider important and interesting, are apparent in what they write It is the purpose of this part of the report to investigate the concerns that are manifest in the children's letters through an examination of the language functions in which these concerns occur.

Use of the term 'concern' is intended to reflect the fact that much of the letter writing that children do does not have a topic in any usual rhetorical or linguistic sense. This writing might be called pre-topical in that it involves a somewhat amorphous, yet pervasive concern with interpersonal relationships. Certainly there are occasions when a specific topic, like a sport or a particular academic subject, is apparent, but generally even these are woven into the larger concern of interpersonal relations. The term 'language function' is used here to refer to the surface level manifestation of the writer's intention, the goal to be achieved by a written sentence part, whole sentence, or series of sentences. The language functions, for example, complimenting or inviting, convey the writer's aims in communicating, and they also reflect his or her attitude with respect to the larger concern with interpersonal relations.

This section begins with a discussion of the most frequently occurring language function in the data, which is perhaps most accurately described as an affirmation of friendship. The child's concern in these instances is unquestionably with the interpersonal, "you and me." The second section investigates other language functions that occur in letters among peers, while the third examines what children write to adults. Finally there are case studies of two children, James and Caridad, who use the postal system extensively and yet in rather dissimilar ways.

2.1 Affirmations of Friendship. This function is treated first and in a section of its own because of its pervasiveness in the data. It seems to be the function that appears first in children's letters, the one from which others evolve. However, the reasons for its pervasiveness are apparently as much socially based as they are developmentally based. Affirmations of friendship are a matter of convention in children's letter writing. For reasons that will be suggested below, they become the standard of appropriateness. The letter in (1) illustrates one basic form of the function.

1) Sept 21, 1981
Dear Caridad
you are my best
frend
(pic)
Love
Zoraya (Mr. D, 3)

(After each letter the author's classroom and grade level are identified. The children's spelling, punctuation, spacing, line breaks, and placement of letter parts have not been altered. Misspelled words of questionable decipherability are corrected in parentheses. '(Pic)' appears between the body of the letter and the closing, where the picture box is placed on the stationery, if the writer drew a picture. A letter may be assumed to have been addressed to a classmate, unless it is otherwise identified. When a writer did not sign a letter, his or her name appears in parentheses at the end of the letter. A letter written in Spanish is followed immediately by the English translation.)

There is another basic form which the affirmation of friendship takes, illustrated in (2). Here there is an expression of feeling rather than a claim of status.

2) 9\2\81
Dear
Gina I love
you very
much
(pic)
Becky (Mrs. F, 2)

Typically a child who uses one of these basic forms does not use the other. Children seem to settle on a particular strategy that feels right and use it as a foundation on which to build.

There may be a tendency for less experienced writers to write more simple, pared down affirmations of friendship than those for whom writing comes more easily. For example, Julio, who as a fourth grader still had considerable difficulty with writing, wrote the undated (3) sometime in November. (Julio was retained in the fourth grade the following year.)

3) John you
are my friend
(Julio) (Ms R, 4)

However, the trend toward simplicity cannot be attributed to ability or experience only. Students have other reasons for writing what they do. Five days after Becky wrote the letter in (2), she wrote to Gina again, as shown in (4).

4) Dear 9/7/81
Gina I love
you very much
you are nice
I miss you
when I am at
home
(pic)
Becky

(Becky's pictures are nearly always hearts, with or without arrows through them.) Here, in addition to her "I love you," Becky provides a reason for her affirmation of friendship, or an explanation for the basis for her feelings, "You are nice," and a statement about the effect of having these feelings, "I miss you when I am at home." Her letter is tight and coherent. Clearly Becky makes choices when she writes as to how simple and short she wants her letter to be, or how elaborated. Most frequently during the year, she chose to write short, unadorned affirmations of friendship.

Similarly Zoraya is not limited to writing letters as streamlined in their affirmations of friendship as (1). She did (1) in cursive handwriting, a skill which was quite new to her as a third grader, and one which may have been distracting her from focusing on other aspects of her writing. Four days previous to writing (1), she had sent (5) to Caridad, this one printed rather than in cursive writing.

5) Dear Caridad 9/17
I like you because you are
nice to me. Cari you are my
best friend
(pic)
Love Zoraya

Here she gives a reason for her feelings and uses an affirmation of friendship to create a powerful punch line. Zoraya's second letter to Caridad, in (1), may be simpler because of the strain of doing cursive writing, or because it was her second letter and she had already outdone herself in the first. (Caridad had written to her on September 17, too, so the brevity of Zoraya's second letter was probably not due to frustration at failure to get a response from Caridad.) Since native English speakers, as well as children whose first language is Spanish, write identical affirmations of friendship in English, it is also unlikely that a lack of fluency in English is the cause of the brevity of these letters. Whatever other factors may be involved, it seems clear that children write affirmations of friendship, at least in part, because that is the socially appropriate thing to do.

The remainder of this section examines an illustrative selection of letters in which an affirmation of friendship is the only or primary language function in an effort to describe and, where possible, to explain the variation that occurs. One of the more common means by which a letter containing an affirmation of friendship is enlarged is by reference to an activity in which the writer and the addressee participate together. In (6), for example, Becky names the general category of play.

6) Dear Julia
I love you very
much and I like to
play with you.
(pic)
Love Becky (Mrs. F, 2)

In (7) Alex names a specific shared play activity in his letter to a friend in another classroom.

Sept 24
7) Dear Mario
I like to play
kickball with you
and I like you
Mario
(pic)
by Alex (Mrs. F, 3)

(Alex addresses Mario directly in his letter, a common occurrence among some children. Also, he closes his letter with 'by', an action which suggests that his letter writing is influenced by other school writing tasks.) In (8), Carlos names a specific activity, as well as his other friends who participate in it.

8) 12-3-81
Dear Guillermo
You are my Best
friend and we
play monsters with
jose and alejandro
and alvaro
your friend
Carlos (Mr.D, 3)

Andy mentions another best friend, as well as a shared activity, in (9).

9) 3-25-82
Dear Eliseo
your my best
friend and Carlos
and we play
kickball
(pic)

friend
Andy (Mr. D, 3)

The naming of a shared activity seems to provide a context for the affirmation of friendship. This in effect reflects a real world truth, that the shared activity is, in a sense, the context in which the friendship is embedded. Contextualization has long been recognized as a feature of children's developing language. It is not surprising, therefore, that as these children struggle to connect with one another through the strange medium of writing, they draw from the salient features of the contexts in which their friendships take place.

In (10), Alma not only names an activity which she and her friend share, but also makes a boast (or at least states what she perceives to be a fact), which makes the contextual background of the shared activity come alive for her.

10) October 8 1981
Dear Zoraya
you are my best friend
and sometimes you play
with me tetherball and I
win you all the time
(pic)
your best friend
Alma (Mr. D, 3)

In (11), Julia's reference to shared activities occurs in an offer or bargain she is making.

11) Dec 7
Dear Delfina
I like you very
much you are my Best
Freind Delfina
I am your Best Frend
I will be in your club
if you play house with
me today
love Julia (Mrs. F, 2)

There is the sense here that Julia is indirectly asking for friendship, perhaps that she is attempting to arrange for activities that will give the association a chance to grow. The concept of being best friends, as it appears in children's letters, does not seem to involve mutuality. "You are my best friend" is a statement about my feelings for you. "I am your best friend" is a statement about my behavior toward you; I am nice to you. Being a best friend does not involve exclusivity, either. As Andy's letter in (9) shows, it is possible to have more than one best friend. Furthermore, just as it is possible to have a best friend, one can also have a best cousin, as Carlos' letter in (12) to Philip, who is in another classroom, illustrates.

12) Sept 17 1981
Dear Phillip
Yuo are my Best
cousin and we go to
your house and we Play
soccer and marbles and
baseball and catch
love Carlos (Mr. D, 3)

Naming a shared activity is a method several children use to elaborate an affirmation of friendship. They ground it, or lend it credence, by making reference to a familiar activity. There are other methods used to lend credence to an affirmation of friendship. What Caridad does is to tell her friends why she likes them, as in (13). (See Section 2.5 for a detailed examination of Caridad's use of the postal system.)

13) 10/8
Dear Margaret
I like you because you are nice
to me and you are nice to
Norma to good by

Margaret
Your friend Caridad (Mr. D, 3)

Patricia's strategy for elaborating her affirmations of friendship is to promise a gift, as in (14).

14) 4/21
Dear Isela
I like you and
I will boing
gum for you?
Love Patricia (Ms G, 3)

(Patricia has begun to take note of the question mark. Perhaps her use of it here reflects a question in her mind as to whether or not she will be able to bring gum for Isela.) Patricia's strategy is actually more general than (14) demonstrates. She follows her affirmations of friendship with a kind thought of some sort, which provides evidence of her good intention. (15) illustrates another example of this strategy.

15) Dear Elizabeth
your my best
friend and I hope
you in my next
class in 4
(pic)
Love Patricia (Ms G, 3)

Toward the end of the year Patricia wrote a letter in which her concern with interpersonal relations seems to have grown into a real topic. The letter is clearly an affirmation of friendship, but here she is focusing directly on the topic of being friends. The letter, in (16), is written to a friend in another classroom.

16) 5/17
Dear Melissa
How are you? I am fine thank you.
I hope we all could be friend
for every and every every me and

Liz has so lets be friend like
me and Liz
(pic)
Love Patricia (Ms G, 3)

(This is Patricia's first use of what becomes a commonly used strategy among the more mature letter writers: asking a question of her addressee and then answering it for herself. "How are you? I am fine," actually becomes a standard, ritualistic greeting in many children's letters. Patricia is one of the few students who uses a question mark in the question answer sequence. Once children start using it as a standard greeting, they no longer perceive it as containing a real question. For Patricia here "How are you?" still is a real question, and she even goes so far as to thank her addressee for hypothetically having asked it. This sort of play with language, pretending someone has asked a question and answering, demonstrates a growing control of the rules of language use.)

Even among some of the most mature fourth graders affirmations of friendship are sometimes the sole concern of a letter. Cindy's letter in (17) demonstrates quite a sophisticated concept of what friendship is.

17) 1/24/82
Dear Yvonne. Hi I like you and your a
special friend to me and nobody else is. And
I like you very very much and I Love
you as a friend. I will like you always
even if we fight even if you mad at
me I will always like you and love
you. Love you Yvonne and I don't care If
you lagh either
Love you always Cindy (Ms R, 4)

Such demonstrativeness is by no means characteristic only of the older girls, as Nieves' letter in (18) shows.

18)   October 1981
I love you Lorena
and you love mi to
and I sent you This Letter
because I love you
so mutch
(Nieves) (Ms G, 2)

(Note the Spanish influence in Nieves' spelling of 'me': mi.)

It is interesting to note that affirmations of friendship did not occur in the oral language of these children during observations of their face to face interaction. Friendships are negotiated, maintained, broken, and renegotiated in a myriad of ways in the course of the day's activities, but strong affirmations of friendship, as illustrated here, seem to be limited to letter writing. The question arises as to why they are so pervasive in children's letters. While there are no conclusive answers, several possiblities are available. The first, and perhaps the most obvious takes this line of thinking: children write letters in order to get letters in return; saying something nice is likely to insprire a recipient to write back; an affirmation of friendship is something nice. There is no doubt some truth to this line of thinking, but it does not go deep enough.

Often in children's behavior there are evidences of precursors of adult behavior. Child forms evolve into adult forms as children make generalizations, and test and refine them. Since such direct affirmations of friendship do not occur as the sole language function in adult letters, it is reasonable to ask what adult behavior children might be approximating with their affirmations of friendship. Typically adults write letters about mutual interests, topics that grow out of a shared framework of experience. Might it not be true that children, too, are searching for topics of mutual interest, and that affirmations of friendship focus on the most accessible candidate: you and me? That is, you and me in our entirety, the whole being easier than the parts, the whole person being easier to focus on than his or her attributes. It seems that affirmations of friendship might be the most available way to connect with a person through writing for writers who have not yet gained a sure sense of control over the medium. For these writers, too, a letter is a gift with a message. The message is important, but the giving of the gift, with the hope of receiving one in return, is more so. An affirmation of friendship in a letter, then, is a gesture which allows children to connect in writing from the start. It provides a way of taking a turn, giving the recipient something tangible to indicate that the turn is now his. Later it will be refined and broken down into a variety of less global, more adult-like functions.

2.2 Other Uses of the Postal System among Peers.

In this section the concerns or topics children write about to their peers form the organizational basis for an examination of the language functions they employ. Interpersonal relations is the overriding concern among peers and is considered first, followed by school and free time activities.

Much of the strictly interpersonal writing takes place between girls. Compliments abound as children focus on writing something that will inspire a response. Zoraya's letter in (1) starts off with two compliments.

1) 10-10-81
Querida Lili
tu eres bonita y tienes bonito
pelo. y me gusta jugar contigo a
tetherball. mira la estampilla
si te gusta me dices y man
dame una carta
(pic)
Love
Zoraya P (Mr. D, 3)

(Dear Lili
you are pretty and you have pretty
hair. and I like to play
tetherball with you. look at the stamp
if you like it tell me and send
me a letter
Love
Zoraya)

As Zoraya gravitates toward a request for a letter from Lili by giving her a specific task ("look at the stamp tell me if you like it"), it becomes reasonable to infer that her intent in paying Lili the compliments is, at least in part, to contribute to the effort to get Lili to write back. "Say something nice, if you want a response."

The intent of Alma's compliment in (2) is more difficult to infer. Perhaps her entire letter is really an affirmation of friendship clad in a compliment. Certainly Alma's inexperience at paying compliments shows.

2) 1-13-82
Dear Zoraya P.
I like your dress
because it's like my dress
and my dress is red
and your dress
is yellow
(pic)
Your friend
Alma D (Mr. D, 3)

In Julia's letter in (3), there is a cumulative effect in her three compliments at the end, as she progresses from the merely descriptive to the superlative.

3) September 10 1981
I like you
missy y you are
good to me
I like to play with
you on the swings
with you.
Missy you are cute
Missy how did you get
so prite
your the cuteest girl
(Julia) (Mrs. F, 2)

In (4) Julia uses first an affirmation of friendship, then a simple yes/no question as to whether or not her addressee is her friend, then an invitation, and another affirmation of friendship, all in aid of cementing the friendship. She follows these language functions with some information about herself, the intent of which is not absolutely clear.

4) 9/29
Dear Susy
I like you very
much. are you
my friend Susy
I what you to
come to my House
Susy V
I like you very much
I am seven years old
my favrite animal
is a tertle
Love Julia (Mrs. F, 2)

Perhaps Julia's teacher or someone of influence in her life has told her that writing about herself is an appropriate thing to do in a letter, and she is giving it a try. She wrote part of this same information, that the turtle is her favorite animal, to her teacher, too.

Just as they write about being friends in their letters, girls also write about not being friends. (5) is again from Julia. Here she is seeking friendship, as she has before, but in this instance she is considering why she might not be her addressee's friend.

5) 12/4
Dear Delfina
I like very much
will you be my freind.
I like to play with you.
I am seven years
old. I know why your
not my Freind becuse I am
littleer than you
I know that I'm only
seven
Love
Julia (Mrs. F, 2)

Julia's addressee in (5), Delfina, is older than Julia and a grade ahead. Here it seems that Julia's purpose in telling Delfina that she is seven years old is not so much to inform her as to explain why Delfina doesn't like her better, and perhaps to imply that size and age are not justifiable reasons for a lack of friendliness.

Some girls write not only about their own friendships, but also about the friendships of others. In (6) Judith wants to control her addressee's choice of friends.

6) 3-30
Dear Shirley
tu estas Bonita
y Shirley no
seas a miga
de otras ninas
solo de Beatriz
y yo
Love
Judith (Ms R, 4)

(Dear Shirley
you are pretty
and Shirley don't
be friends
with other girls
only with Beatriz
and me
Love
Judith)

(Notice that Judith's opening and closing are in English. Sometimes bilingual or Spanish speaking students who are learning English do just the reverse, opening and closing in Spanish and writing the body of the letter in English. Clearly these children perceive of a letter as having distinct parts.) The friendship Judith wants to organize is a triumvirate made up of Shirley, Beatriz, and her. Others are to be excluded.

Occasionally girls are more explicit about who an addressee is to not be friends with. Such is the case in Yvonne's letter in (7).

7) March 3
Dear Lizzy
I think that you are a very good
friend and I have Notice that you
are not Melissa friend and eather
is Patricia or me and I think
that is the best thing
Love
Yvonne (Ms R, 4)

Such writing demonstrates a type of behavior educators do not want to nurture. Certainly the ground rules that each teacher lays for letter writing would advise against such unkindness. However, it seems important to acknowledge that this sort of writing does sometimes occur, and that it expresses feelings that will be manifest in other forms if they are not written. An occasional unkind letter does not constitute a reason to stifle the privacy or freedom of choice children have in their letter writing.

It may even be true that if children feel free to express the worst of what they feel, they can then explore the full range of their feelings in the letters they write. In (8), for example, Patricia makes a complaint and then goes on to affirm her friendship with her addressee.

8) 3-3
Dear Lizzy
I not like you when you
seit (cheat) in thrreball and I like
you when you play with me
and I hope you will be in
my calss in my nast calss
and now good-by Take
care writh back
Love
Patricia (Ms G, 3)

Similarly, it is possible to express regret in order to keep a friendship going, as in (9) and (10).

9) Dear Sonia
I am sorry what
I did that day
I like you for a
Best frend. I hope
you like me for
a Best frend
I like you o.k.
Missy (Mrs. F, 3)

10) 1/21/82
(Pat)
I'm sorry for what I said and
thanks for the candy. It is good
and I really am sorry and I
hope you will forgive me for what
I said and I like you a lot
by your
freind
Liz (Ms R, 4)

The purpose of writing letters is not only to say what is easy, but also, maybe, what is hard.

It is not to be suggested that only girls engage in writing that is soley concerned with interpersonal relationships. Boys do it, too, but not as much. In (11) and (12), respectively, Jose and Julio seem to be selecting characteristics of their friends that stand out to them. Both letters are descriptive and, in a sense, nonengaged.

11) 1/18
Dear Glen
Glen you are a bad boy you are
a good friend and you are a good
dodgeball player and good-by glen
Jose A (Ms R, 4)

12) 1/21
John
you are funny
and you are my freind
and you like Spainish dogeball
(Julio) (Ms R, 4)

Most of the writing that is really about interpersonal relationships is either between girls and about girls, or between boys and about boys. In two of the classrooms where the research project was conducted, it was fashionable to be interested in the opposite sex, and in two it was not. And in the two classrooms in the first category, the interest in the opposite sex was apparent in some children's letters. In Mrs. F's room, for example, (13) was written.

13) 12-9-81
Dear Wendy
Do you like
Rodney I like
him I hope
you Do like
him all the
girls do But sonia
likes Gabriel
from
No Yes Missy (Mrs. F, 3)
☐ ☒

Missy asks her question of Wendy at the outset and later repeats it. (Asking if the addressee likes a particular person and supplying boxes to be checked in the affirmative or negative is a popular custom in Mrs. F and Ms R's rooms. This is a method of treating the postal system as if it were informal note passing, in which the same note gets passed back and forth.) Missy's letter provides some information as to Rodney's standing with the girls in Room F. Then Rodney's letter in (14) provides some information as to where he stands amidst all his popularity.

14) 12/1/81
To kose from Rodney
Dear Kose how are you
Tell sonia Dus she Love
Gadriel I She dus Tell
her why dusent she Love
me better then Gabriel
If she Love Gabriel better tell
her thet Im going to get Gabriel
I Love Sonia
To Kose
(Rodney) (Mrs. F, 3)

(Note Rodney's two uses of 'tell' rather than 'ask'. He provides evidence for Carol Chomsky's (1969) finding that children over-generalize their use of the verb 'tell' before they acquire mature awareness of the distinction between the two verbs.) After Rodney's formulaic greeting, he makes a request of Kose to get some information for him. Contingent upon the answer to this first question, he requests that Kose get some more information for him. And contingent upon the answer to this question, he asks Kose to convey a threat for him. Then he tells how he feels about Sonia, which, in effect, is an explanation for everything that preceded. As well as writing about Sonia, Rodney also writes to her a few times during the year. (15) provides an example before they became, in their teacher's words, "an item" in Room F.

15) 10/13/81
sonia
Dear sonia I like you
if Roul hits you tell
me and if any body
hits you I will get them
(pic)
(Rodney) (Mrs. F, 3)

Later, Rodney wrote Sonia one or two short love letters.

In Room A-3 Karla and Joseph are interested in one another, Karla being the pursuer, and Joseph the sometimes reluctant pursuee. Joseph's interest in girls is apparent in a letter early in the year to Danny, shown in (16).

16) October 8 1981
Dear Danny
did you like when
the girls were
chasing us. x
from
Joseph (Ms G, A-3)

Karla's letter in (17) is undated, but the issue of chasing is still certainly pertinent.

17) Joseph

Joseph I am
going to
shaes (chase) you
if you do
what we said
to do we will
not shaes you
(Karla) (Ms G, A-3)

Here she threatens Joseph with pursuit. (Note Karla's spelling of 'chase.' Because the variety of Spanish she speaks does not have the sh sound, while it does have the very similar 'ch', she is having difficulty determining just where each sound belongs in English. As for the vowels, she knows which ones belong in 'chase,' but she hasn't mastered the final e generalization that would tell her where they go.)

During the last month of school, Karla and Joseph actually correspond with each other. (See Section 3.4, Number 24 for the letters.) Karla complains that Joseph doesn't write to her just because she is a girl, and he acknowledges that she is essentially correct, he does not want to be the target of embarassing remarks. The postal system provides an additional arena in which boys and girls can explore their relationships with one another.

Among academic or other school-related concerns, writing letters gets written about quite a bit. Sometimes the concern is with getting a letter in return, as Octavio's letter in (17) demonstrates.

17) Sept 17
Estimado
Alejandro
te traigo esta
carta porke
eres mi mejor
primo
te mando esta
carta paraque
me mandes tu
una carta
(Octavio) (Ms G, 2)

(Dear
Alejandro
I am bringing you this
letter because
you are my best
cousin
I am sending you this
letter so that
you will send me
a letter)

Among the youngest writers, like Octavio, it is likely that writing letters about writing letters is a kind of contextualization of the activity. It is the natural thing to write about, because that is what is happening. Octavio is absolutely open and direct about his reason for writing to Alejandro.

In (18) Caridad's talk about writing letters seems to be used as evidence for the existence of her friendship with Ruth, part of the affirmation of friendship.

> 18) 10-81
> Dear Ruth
> I like you because you are
> nice to me and I wrote
> you back and I know you
> wrote me. the End and good by
> (pic)
> Love
> Caridad M (Mr. D, 3)

(It is Caridad's custom to tell her addressee why she likes her. See Section 2.5 for a fuller discussion of Caridad's use of the postal system.)

Alma focuses on the appearance of a letter she received from her fourth grade friend, Debbie, in (19), and gets swept into the spirit of complimenting her.

> 19) 9-16-81
> Dear Debby tank you
> for your cart I lik it
> it was beatiful an you
> ar beatiful to becouse you
> always Play with me.
> (pic)
> You friend
> (Alma) (Mr. D, 3)

(Alma's spelling of 'thank' is influenced by the variety of Spanish she speaks, which does not have the th sound that

English does. She may well have Spanish 'carta' in mind in her spelling of 'card.' For other instances of her nonstandard spelling, it is difficult to be sure whether the influence of Spanish or difficulty with the intricacies of English spelling is the cause. In some cases both are, no doubt, operating.)

Debbie's return letter, in (20) expresses thanks for Alma's letter and corrects her on a matter of spelling.

20) Sept 24
Dear Alma
Alma tank you for the cartd you gave
me and you don't spell my name like
this Debby you spell my name like
this Debbie I will give your teatherball
back Sunday
good by
you Friend
Debbie (Ms R, 4)

In (21) Judith thanks Shirley for her letter, tells her she likes it, says it was pretty, refers to what Shirley said in it about how she was, tells Shirley again that she likes the letter, and asks for another card, please. The whole letter can be regarded as an extended affirmation of friendship.

21) 3/11
Shirley
querida Shirley yo quiero
a ser tu me Jor amiga
grasias por tu carta a mi
me gusto tu carta
esta ba muy Bonita
como estas tu yo
esto muy bien
y tu en tu carta me
dises que estas bien
Shirley me gusto tu
carta mucho sheirley
me escribes otra
carta por favor
By

Judith V (Ms R, 4)

(Shirley
dear Shirley I want
to be your best friend
thank you for your letter
I liked your letter
it was very Pretty
how are you
I am just fine
and you in your letter
tell me that you are fine
Shirley I liked your
letter a lot shierley
write me another
letter please
By
Judith)

Alex received a long letter that he liked from James (See Section 2.4 for a discussion of the nature of James' use of the postal system.) and wrote (22) a month or so later, perhaps in response.

22) 9/17
Dear
James I hope
you send me
more and
more letters
I like you
(Alex) (Mrs. F, 3)

In (23) Joseph registers a complaint, in a somewhat indirect manner.

23) October 8

Dear Manuel
I don't Now why
you dont write
back to me
I wrote 2
letters.
(pic)
from
Joseph (Ms G, 3)

Clearly getting letters is a major concern among users of the postal system, and that goal in itself is reason enough to write a letter.

While the postal system is part of the academic program at Colmar, the manner in which children write about it, compared to the manner in which they write about other academic subjects, sets it apart from the rest of the curriculum. There is a sense of urgency in the sending and receiving of letters. Furthermore, in contrast to the many letters about writing letters, there are very few, among peers, about specific academic subjects. In (24) Cindy is writing about a writing test the fourth grade class took. The fact that she found the event worthy of a letter suggests the significance it has for her.

24) Dec 14, 1981
Dear Yvonne
When I took the heart test I wrote
about when I had to go to the hopsital
because the wood in my foot. What
did you write about?
Love always
Your friend Cindy (Ms R, 4)

In (25) Liz complains, and perhaps commiserates with her addressee.

25) (Susan)
I hate math quizes dayda?
I mean I relly hate math quizes
We are going to work in your
commeits
by
Liz (Ms R, 4)

Among the fourth graders, James, too, writes about academic subjects. (Again, Section 2.4 is focused exclusively on James' use of the postal system.) Among the younger children, Maria's letter in (26) provides a rare example of focus on an academic subject among peers.

26) June 18, 1982
Dear Yesenia
how were you i'm
good at spelling you
are to very good at
spelling by yesenia
your frind
Maria A

It may be that Maria is bragging about her spelling ability, but it seems more likely that she is identifying something that she and her addressee share, the fact that they are both good at spelling. Thus what looks like a compliment may actually be the other half of this identification process.

Just as there is a limited amount of writing about academic subjects among peers, so is there a limited amount of writing about other school related concerns. When fourth graders are "off track" at Colmar, that is, on their three week vacation following nine weeks of school, they have the opportunity to work at school as tutors, helping younger children. This is what Liz writes about in one letter to Pat, in (27).

27) Pat 1/21
do you what to be a tutier
and I what to be one -
and Melissa whats to be
a tutier.
Liz (Ms R, 4)

It is also possible to work in the cafeteria, as Yvonne writes about in (28).

28) 9/22/81
Dear Beatriz
thank you for sighning up to work
in the cafeteria I hope you like
working in there. on Friday lets
sighn up
Love
Yvonne (Ms R, 4)

In (29) Sandra expresses great pleasure at having secret knowledge of the date of her teacher's birthday.

29) 3-15-82
Dear Regina
Only me and you now
when is Mrs. F's
birthday. Don't tell
nobody ok. You are
my best friend
(pic)
Don't tell
nobody o.k.
Love,
Sandra (Mrs. F, 3)

Sandra's concern with keeping the matter secret is clear with her two directives. Her affirmation of friendship is designed to secure the secret. A best friend does not reveal such important matters.

In Section 2.1 it was demonstrated that the first elaborations of affirmations of friendship are often statements that the writer and addressee play a particular sport or game together. Whether school related or not, sports and games are written about frequently, when an affirmation of friendship is not the main focus of the letter. The boys play and write about kickball and dodgeball, while the girls are most interested in tetherball. Nieves' letter in (30), which focuses on kickball, illustrates his characteristic effusiveness.

30) october 1981
Dear Soseph Im
so Happy if you Play
wath my on
Recess ckikball
and Im going to di
on your tiem Thanks
for the leter
(Nieves) (Ms G, 2)

(A number of interesting points could be made about Nieves' spelling. It has some strikingly nonstandard features, some of which reflect his native Spanish and others of which bespeak his conscious efforts to master some of the quirks of English. Particularly noteworthy is 'ckikball;' he knows about the ck combination, but he hasn't yet mastered where it occurs.)

Also on the subject of kickball is Joseph's letter to Raul in (31). Here Joseph compliments his addressee and issues what is probably intended as an invitation in the form of a yes/no question. He also requests a letter in return, suggesting that getting a reply is an integral part of his purpose in writing.

31) October 1981
Dear Raul
you are a good kicker.
Do you want to play kickball.
Please writ back
From
Joseph (Ms G, 4)

In (32) Andy seems to be waxing philosophical about the outcomes of both soccer and kickball games.

32) 11-30-81
Dear Ruben
yo y tu jugamos
soccer y tambien
jugamos kickball
y algunas yo gano
y algunas tu ganas
y tambien hay empate
tu amigo
Andy H (Mr. D, 3)

(Dear Ruben
I and you play
soccer and also
we play kickball
and sometimes I win
and sometimes you win
and also there are ties

your friend
Andy H)

And in (33) Bobby gives Jose a suggestion about how to play dodgeball.

33) Jose
Why in Dogball you allwes
Duck Just let them get
you out ok
By
Bobby (Ms R, 4)
yes

It is not clear why Bobby is telling Jose how to lose the game.

In (34) Liz combines a concern with tetherball with some other school related matters. Her compliment on Melissa's ability at tetherball is followed by a statement about her own ability, which establishes a rather competitive tone.

34) 9/22/81
Dear melisa,
you can play
tetherball reall
good. and I can
allmost win you
out! and melissa
what level are
you on. I'm on
leve 4 melissa!
I like work
in the Learning
Center I wish
you could work
wiht me please
write Love
back Liz (Ms R, 4)
Melissa!

Liz carries the competitive spirit over into the subject of spelling, where she asks Melissa how she is doing. The repeated exclamation point indicates Liz's confidence in her own standing. Her final statement softens the competitive edge and serves to affirm the friendshhip.

Miguel's letter in (35) is another that combines focus on a sport with other interpersonal concerns.

35) April 14, 1982
Dear John
We are going to play Hockey
today. But that still does'nt
mean Im not going to get back
at Micheal. Micheal shouldnt
do bad thing. ooh ooh
by I have to leave
(Miguel) (Ms R, 4)

Implicitly on the subject of sports and games, but explicitly focusing on interpersonal relationships are Rodney's letters in (36) and (37).

36) 1-18-82
Dear Alex
you pass our gang
your a leader
you and Gabriel
and me and Kose
I will tell you
hus in are gang
me Kose you Luis
Gabriel christ
Butch Phillip and

YOU PASS
#1
(Rodney) (Mrs. F, 3)

37) 1-19-82
Dear Alex
will you take over
leader for me if I'm
not her
(pic)
(Rodney)

In (36) Rodney is welcoming Alex into the gang and informing him about it, and in (37) he makes a request. The dates on the letters indicate that focus on a particular concern can carry over from day to day. Rodney has a customary face that he draws, rather than signing his name to his letters.

In (38) Jose asks to borrow one or another of Roberta's games.

38) January
12-1982
Dear Roberta
Roberta iF you
could bring the
Football game
or the hocky
game could
you lend me
your Foot ball
score game
you are a
nice girl.
let me and
Robert and Glenn
your Firend
~~Jose~~
Munch (Ms R, 4)

It is natural to wonder if Jose's compliment is not a fairly obvious effort to get Roberta to comply with his request. Munch or Munchy is Jose's nickname, and he wanted to be associated with it here.

Sports and games blend into other free time activities. In (39) Jose is writing about a boxing match coming up on television that evening.

39) September 1981
Dear Miguel
Miguel Who do you
go for in the fit
today in the nigth
I go for Herns I
bet you go for Sugre
Lonr We do not no
Who is ging to
win iym going
to see it
in my houes
Good By.
your friend
Jose (Ms R, 4)

Among free time activities, plans for play activities are important to write about. In Missy's letter in (40), concern with interpersonal relations is closely interwoven with ideas for how she and Sonia might get together.

40) Dear sonia
are you my friend I
want to be your
friend. If you want
me to go to your
house I will. can you
to to my house when
it stops raining. I will
pick you up if your
mom lets you go
bo you like Wendy
yes or no. I like
☐ ☐ you
very very
much
Love
Missy (Mrs. F, 3)

Delfina's letter in (41) is quite similar to Missy's in that the suggestion for how they might get together to play is prefaced with a question as to whether her addressee is her friend.

41) Dear
Wendy are you my friend
yes or no can you go
☐ ☐ to my house
I cod go down your house
I'm staying over your house
o.k. I like you wendy
last nith my rother het me
and I codden't Brether
it was sade I was cring
Love
Delfina

After her offer to visit Wendy and spend the night, Delfina affirms her friendship with Wendy, and then confides in her about being hit by her brother and having the wind knocked out of her.

Going to the library is another free time activity, which

Yvonne writes about in (42).

42) 3/11
Dear Cindy
how have you
been ask your
mom again if
you can go to
the libery on
Wednesday but
please don't
ask your father
Love
Yvonne

Major holidays, especially Christmas, receive a lot of attention in letters as they approach, as Kose's letter in (42) illustrates.

42) 12-10-81
Dear Rodney
how are you what are you
going to get for Christmas
I'm getting a racing track
good By
SOS #1
(Kose) (Mrs. F, 3)

As well as curiosity about family Christmases, children are also concerned with giving gifts to one another, as shown in Rodney's letter in (43).

43) 12/16/81
Dear Delphina
thaks for the rubecub
I like for a friend
I will get you somthing
for Christmas goodby
(Rodney) (Mrs. F, 3)

Other special events are occasions for letters, and going to Disneyland is certainly one of these, as Miguel's letter in (44) illustrates.

44) May 27, 1982
Dear John
I cant wait for June 8, 82
that is the day we go
to Disneyland it is

going to be fun and
if we get lost that
would be real fun
Your friend
Miguel (Ms R, 4)

When a child must move, the separation is an ordeal both for the child moving and the friends being left behind. Liz's letter in (45) deals with Patricia's impending move. She both focuses directly on her feelings and talks about free time activities that are of mutual interest to the two girls.

45) Nov 23, 1981
Dear Patricia,
I'm glad you are still
hear. Because I like you
alot. And I don't whant
you to go because you
are my Freind. and I
like you very much and
I don't whant you
to go. did you
see Mary Poppins on Sunday
night because it came
on at 8:00. and it was
Funny. I made some
dogs and the two
pretty whants are you
and me.
Love
Lizzy

In writing letters to their peers, children use the postal system as an added dimension in the carrying on of their social lives. Among the less experienced writers, the strain of writing limits what gets put down on paper. As children's experience with writing increases, their letters become more and more reflective of the full range of their concerns in their relationships with their peers.

2.3 Letters to Adults. This section approaches children's letters to adults in the same manner that their letters to peers were considered in Section 2.2. The topics or concerns written about form the organizational basis for an examination of the language functions employed. The majority of letters to adults are concerned with interpersonal relationships and/or academic matters. And it is perhaps not surprising that the most common language function is the compliment. There are good reasons for demonstrating deference to those in power.

Among the less experienced writers writing about interpersonal relations, the expression of one simple compliment can be difficult. In (1) the part of Octavio's letter beginning with the unstruck out 'because' is written in the classroom aide's hand.

1) Dear Mrs G
you are the best
Teacher ~~beeuase~~
because you are nice
(Octavio) (Ms G, 2)

It may well be that Octavio spent his entire post office center time getting up to the 'because' part and asked for help in completing his thought before clean up time. Since he had addressed the letter first, he was able to finish, although he did not get a chance to sign it.

Karla, in (2), had an easier time.

2) Sept 21 1981.
Ms. G
Ms. G
.I like you I tinke
yuo are the
best ticher
(pic)
Ms. G
Karla (Ms G, 2)

In an important sense children's expressions of liking or loving their teachers are no different from the affirmations of friendship discussed at length in Section 2.1. Yet it is clear, from the implied expressions of reverence that are present in their explanations of why they have strong feelings about their teachers, that these children sense the social distance between their teachers and themselves. As expressed in (2), Karla assigns Ms G's excellence in the superlative. In (3) Patricia focuses on her teacher's relationship with, or attention to, her personally.

3) Dear Mis G
I like you so
much because
you are a good
teacher with me
(pic)
Love
Patricia (Ms G, 3)

In (4) Zoraya identifies a particular thing that her teacher does that has special meaning for her.

4) Sept. 21, 1981
Dear Mr. D,
you ar my best teacher,
because you play with me.
(pic)
love
Zoraya P. (Mr. D, 3)

While it is not impossible that Zoraya is demonstrating particular precocity by observing her teacher's ability to get down on his students' level, it is more likely that her letter does not reflect that level of thinking. There are a number of similar letters to teachers in which the student does not demonstrate awareness of the distinction between student and teacher roles. This is not to suggest that these students do not have this awareness, but rather that their writing, in these cases, does not reflect it.

While the letters in (1)-(4) are all written by children who wrote to their teacher only occasionally through the school year, there are a few children who either made it a regular habit to write or went through a short period of writing frequently to their teacher. Becky is a student in the former category. Frequently during the year she wrote letters that varied very little from (5).

5) Dear Mrs F
I love you
you are nice
Love Becky (Mrs. F, 2)

Most of these letters are undated, leaving little possibility of determining when they were written in relation to some much longer and more complex letters that Becky also wrote to her teacher. In (6) there is evidence of the very important role Mrs. F may play in Becky's life, and of the fact that the postal system may provide Becky with a means of expressing this importance.

6) 9/29/81
Dear
Miss F
I Love you very
much and I ~~wheud~~
woud Like to
have you as
my mom Becuse
you are Nice
and you Can come
To my Birthy
Party
(pic)
Becky (Mrs. F, 2)

The date on (6) places it early in the year, indicating that it is not a matter of ability , but rather of choice, which induces Becky to write sometimes short and sometimes long letters. Becky is not the only child who mentions the desirability of having her teacher as a parent. It is impossible to know either the seriousness or the actual nature of her intent, but there is no doubt as to the strength of the compliment. Her invitation to her birthday party, "You can come..." presupposes that her teacher wants to go. This is not an unusual feature of children's invitations.

In a sense Becky's invitation to Mrs. F in (6) can be viewed as a compliment, that she likes her teacher enough to issue the invitation. However, Becky's writing about interpersonal concerns does go beyond complimenting. In (7) she gives a directive.

7) March 17 1982
Dear Miss F
I love you very much.
how are you doing I'm Doing
fine. tell angel to cwit
shooting and Alex and Jon
and Plhimp and Rotney
and Kose O.K.
(Becky) (Mrs. F, 2)

And in (8) she seems to be doing some perspective taking, asking questions of her principal as she thinks about what his life might be like.

8) March 11, 1982
Dear Mr K
How are you Doing?
and how is it Being
a Pricble is it Horbell
Becky R (Mrs. F, 2)

Kose is a student in the second category mentioned above, i.e., that he went through a short period of writing frequently to his teacher. Between September 18 and September 30 he wrote six letters to her, all of which are very similar to the one in (9).

9) Sept 25
Dear Mrs. F
How are you
and I like you and
I love you
and goodby
Kose (Mrs. F, 3)

Again with Kose, however, it is evident that writing a short, sweet letter is a matter of choice, rather than of ability. During vacations, it is Mrs. F's custom to give her students stationery and a stamped envelope and to invite them to send her a letter through the United States mail. For many students the change of context prompts a distinctly different type of letter, as Kose's letter in (10) illustrates.

10) April 23, 1982
Dear Mrs. F
I I'm playing baketball and
my Dad is vs his friend
jon he woork xxxx withe
him and the scra (score) was
81 to 20 my Dad hit
30 more and all
I I'm Doing is playing
and hleping my Dad
and how are you
and your fambley
in Lahabra and
when we go in 4 grad
and we xxxx tell
you that we want
to stay in room
F Do we still
go to the Bell high
school to swim But
if you won't put a
Black dit in Box yes no
☐ ☐
and if we Do I'm happy
xxxx then.
your friend Kose
(pic)
plese writhe
Back to me

While Kose's message is not always easy to decipher in this letter, the range of concerns he writes about and the range of language functions he employs are quite remarkable in comparison to his other letters to Mrs. F. He not only describes in a general way what he is doing over vacation, but provides specific details about a basketball game that obviously impressed him. He asks about his teacher and her family, and expresses the wish to stay with her when he moves on to grade four. He asks about swimming at Bell High School and gives Mrs. F 'yes' and 'no' boxes to check appropriately. Then he expresses his hope for an affirmative answer, signs off, draws a picture of an eagle (which may or may not represent some connection with the United States mail), and requests a response. Such letters as this one of Kose's hint at some of the constraints which are present when children are writing to people whom they see every day, a point which will be taken up in Section 4. It seems likely that for students like both Becky and Kose, the short, frequent expressions of affection are intended to align their relationship with their teacher in a manner that satisfies some of their personal needs. And for Becky, who wrote many such letters to her peers as well, they seem to be her definition of the norm for letter writing, from which she deviates when there is good reason.

Frequently in letters to their teachers, children blend interpersonal with academic concerns. For example, in (11) Julia compliments Mrs. F, expresses affection for her, tells her how she feels about one school related subject, and how she feels about her performance in two others.

11) March 10, 1982
Dear
Mrs F.
You are a Good teacher
I Like you
I Love math and you are
very Good to me
But I am not Good at
writing I Do art
Better
(pic)
Love
Julia (Mrs. F, 2)

(For the 'I's' of "I Like you" and "I Love math," Julia drew rebus eyes. Her letter was also punctuated with two hearts and a smiling face.)

In (12) Andy expresses gratitude to Ms R, to whose classroom he goes for reading, for her help in that subject.

12) Dear Miss R
y wich that y was in your
clas your the one that make
me ride nise you help Eliseo
me, caridad, carlos D,.
Whit love
Andy (Mr. D, 3)

(The influence of Spanish is evident in several aspects of Andy's spelling. His use of 'y' for 'I' probably has two sources. First is the similarity of 'y' to Spanish 'yo', which means 'I.' The second is that 'y' is itself a meaningful "little" word in Spanish, meaning 'and.' The substitution of one "little" word for another is not unusual. Next is his spelling of 'wish' with ch; since Spanish does not have the English sh sound, ch is the closest approximation. And last, of the most noteworthy Spanish influences, is the spelling of 'reading' with an i. Using Spanish i gives 'reading' the correct pronunciation.)

In (13) Maria wishes her teacher's aide well for the following year, since she has been sick this year, and acknowledges her help on particular projects the class undertook. Maria is a Spanish speaker who is learning English, and she is making a big effort to write in English because the aide does not know Spanish.

13) Dear
Miss B
I hope
you are
next year
to be all riht you
sick on this year
you help us in
bird, Mexico, Hawaii.
your friend
Maria (Ms G, 2)

While some of the more experienced fourth grade writers are more at ease with the medium, their concerns are still a blend of the interpersonal with the academic. For example in (14), Cindy opens with an expression of pleasure at being in Ms R's class, then focuses on spelling, her skill and progress, and ends with acknowledgement of her teacher's kindness toward her and an expression of affection.

14) Nov 23, 1981
Dear Miss R
I like being in your class
and I like spelling because
I do it fast and I'm going
to be in level 15 pretty soon
You are nice to me and I like
you alot.
by now
your student
(pic) Cindy (Ms R, 4)

Clearly Cindy feels good about her performance in spelling and wants her teacher to be aware of it.

In (15) Jose opens with a question to his teacher which he answers with respect to himself, no doubt with pleasure at his academic sense of appropriateness. Then he thanks Ms R for her assistance in math, and closes with two compliments.

15) Jan 18, 1982
Dear R
Miss R What are
you doing I am
gest writing and
riding Ms R
thank you for
shoing me how
to do math.
You are a good
teacher and a nice
lady.
good-by
Love
Jose (Ms R, 4)

(Interpret 'riding' as 'reading,' as in Andy's letter in (12).) It is interesting that Jose divides Ms R into a teacher and a lady, describing the former in terms of skill and the latter in terms of kindness. Perhaps he is working on developing literary style, or perhaps he has other reasons for separating two of Ms R's roles and ascribing them different kinds of attributes.

In (16) Yvonne focuses on math and the significance of knowing one's multiplication tables.

16) Nov 24, 1981
Dear Miss R
My math is very
easy now that
I know my time
table's. Cindy told
me that her
sister missy knows
all her time table's
by hart and
she is only in
third grade.
Love

Yvonne (Ms R, 4)

It is significant to her that a mere third grader could achieve this difficult task.

The topics and language functions discussed to this point present a picture of children's writing to adults that captures its general nature. There is a small set of letters, each of which stands out because of something it reveals about the nature of letter writing at Colmar that has not yet been said.

Ms M is the very popular reading specialist who left Colmar in the middle of the year as the result of a promotion. It was she who implemented the postal system, and she who received and wrote more letters than any other single adult in the school. Her basic activities as reading specialist involved having students who were experiencing difficulty in their classroom come to her for help with reading and writing, and visiting classrooms for special discussion occasions. While she was still at Colmar, she received many letters complimenting her and expressing appreciation for her efforts. She also, occasionally, received letters like (17), in which Zoraya, not understanding why her classmates had the privilege of visiting Ms M, expresses envy and the desire to be selected too.

17) 1-13-82
Dear Ms M
I wish you
take me to why do you
take George and Maria
Lupe? Take me to and I love
you.
(pic)
Love

Zoraya (Mr. D, 3)

When Ms M left Colmar, she invited students to write to her in her new office, and she was deluged with mail. There were many requests for her to return to Colmar, as well as wishes for happiness in her new position. Several letters from one child reacting to Ms M's departure appear in Section 2.5. On one letter writing day when I was observing in Mr. D's classroom, he suggested that students write to an adult who was not in the classroom. Ms M's name came up, and many children decided to write to her. Andy's letter in (18) is not at all like the other letters written that day.

18) 2-17-82
Dear Ms M,
I wich I know
who you are. Ms M
Write me back
(pic)
Love
Andy (Mr. D, 3)

There are several possible interpretations of Andy's letter. Perhaps he simply means that he wishes he knew her. Certainly the social pressure was on to write to Ms M. Andy's willingness to write to someone whom he does not know, and to acknowledge that he does not know her, is somehow suggestive of his lack of experience at letter writing. His tolerance for participating in an activity, the customs surrounding which he is still a little uncertain is admirable.

When I observed in classrooms at letter writing time, children sometimes decided to write to me. Since my official role was to help with any writing problems, usually spelling, I received many compliments on my abiltiy as a writer/speller.

One letter in which the writer did not employ the usual compliments was (19).

19) september 15, 1981
Dear Jennifer greene,
I like lerning how
to write so far I have writtin
one letter and I wrote to
John i wrote to him
about the Phite.
Miguel (Ms R, 4)

In the picture box Miguel wrote the alphabet cursively from a through m and signed his name. The rest of the letter is printed. It is not clear whether his first sentence is about writing cursively or about writing letters, but his letter is clearly very carefully designed for its recipient.

Kose wrote (20) to me after he had written four letters telling me that he liked me, to which I had tried to tactfully respond that I was happy to receive his letters but he was not giving me very much to write back about.

20) Dear Mis Green
I like you and
if you have a
son wirte to me
and tell me how
old is he and if
he go to school
and if he does't
go to tell that
to
(pic)
(Kose) (Mrs. F, 3)

Unquestionably, Kose got my message. And a good long letter in response. He was ready to be inspired to something new. Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development can explain this kind of readiness. With adult encouragement, (it could have been some other impetus of a social nature) Kose used abilities that he possessed that would have gone untapped, at least temporarily, if he had been left to his customary ways. He needed a reason to stretch to something new.

Among the four classroom teachers involved in the research project, Mrs. F was the most enthusiastic letter writer. Her responses to children often involved elaborate pictures, or jokes or riddles. Perhaps related to this, or perhaps because of a host of factors related to Mrs. F personally and to the nature of the operation of the postal system in her classroom, she was the recipient of two letters which stand out from other letters to adults for their openness and complexity. The first, in (21), was written at the start of the year from a former student.

21) August 24, 1981
Dear Miss F How are
you. I am fine. how is your
class. I bet Thay are doing
good. My work is hard in This class
and Sandra and Shirley sit next
to me but we sit by boys
do you know why? Miss R Thinks
we wont but we talk alot
more but we don't talk all The
time. will I have To go
now. by
your freaind
Elizabeth (Ms R, 4)

As children grow older, former teachers become more like friends than current teachers, yet there remain some important distinctions. Liz finds herself in an interesting bind, that of wanting to to confide and possibly brag about getting away with "misbehavior," while simultaneously wanting to be a good girl in her former teacher's eyes.

In (22) Sandra confides some of her feelings about a very big issue in her life, that of moving.

22) 6-1-82
Dear Mrs.F
We are going to move
next week but my mom sed
that we will finish this year
in this school so that's wy
I am happy, but I am
not going to be here next
year now that's bad news. I
am going to mis you
and all my friends.
But I will be back to
this school because I am
a girl scout so I am not
too sad but Regina F
is sad becaus I am movein
too another house but Regina
gave me her adress for
I can send her a letter
I mitht send you a letter too
Allwise your
friend Sandra
YOU ARE VERY PRETTY

Sandra has learned that when distance separates friends, they can stay in touch through writing letters. The postal system has become truly functional for her.

Not all children write to adults in the school, but many do occasionally, and a few do so frequently. Many stay with the usual interpersonal concern of liking and being liked by the adult in question, and in letters to their teacher many combine interpersonal and academic concerns. There are a few instances in which some feature of the writing context encouraged a child to stretch beyond his or her usual letter writing customs.

2.4 James. James is a bilingual fourth grader who writes, at least at school, exclusively in English. He is described by his teacher as a good writer, and he, himself, acknowledged his proficiency in writing during the interview, citing as evidence ten good-writer-of-the-year awards he received when he was in the third grade. As a letter writer, James is outstanding for the variety of apparent purposes for which he writes. He writes about the same concerns that his peers do, but he writes about other things as well. In his lack of inhibition, he calls to mind Art Linkletter's well worn observation, "Kids say the darndest things." He is an observer and monitor of his classmates' behavior, and seems to have strong feelings about what they do. Yet in many cases he is supportive at the same time that he is critical.

James is creative in his use of the postal system. He makes his own lined stationery on sheets of colored construction paper cut to various shapes and sizes. He adds lines in the picture box of the standard stationery when he finds he needs more writing space. For a short while he experimented with using three colors of ink in a single letter, changing colors cyclically every two, three, or four words. This creativity is a reflection of James' confidence as a writer. His control of the medium affords him considerable flexibility in using it.

There are sixty letters from James in the data pool, written to twenty-four people. In addition, James' list of addressees indicates that he wrote thirty letters which were not made available to the project. Why this is so is not clear. While it is the case that some of James' letters are not entirely complimentary, it is also true that other such letters from James were contributed to the project. Another consideration of relevance here is that James did not receive nearly as many letters as he wrote, in spite of the fact that he has good friends. There are seventeen letters to James on record. Perhaps a boy who is such a prolific writer is bound to be disappointed with the number of responses he gets because many of his peers are less inclined to use the postal system as extensively as he does. Or perhaps James has not learned how to inspire people to write back on a regular basis.

Although James' use of the postal system is not entirely representative of his peers, it is interesting because writing letters is, apparently, such a useful communicative tool for him. Examination of a representative sample of James' letters permits a look not only at manifest topics and functions, but also beyond, to some of his assumptions about what letter writing is for, and how it is to be done.

In July or August, at the beginning of the school year before the NIE project began, James wrote the letter in (1) to Alex, who had been a classmate in their second-third grade class the previous year and was now a third grader in Mrs. F's room. From this early point in the year, James seems to be comfortable as a writer and confident of his ability to make the medium work for him. He responds directly to a topic raised in a letter Alex sent (which, unfortunately, is not in the data pool) and goes on to reminisce about events that took place the previous year.

1) Dear Alex. I got your letter
you sent me. You where write
I am on M-10. But you got it
wrong I had to moved to B-2.
Do you whant to now why I
moved. It because the main
billden is being carpet because
the old carpet is riped so
we had to move to B-2.
So thats the story Alex
we had to move. Do you rememder
when we usto go to B-2.
Do you remember Miss R and
Miss G. Remember we played
kickball and we made Homeruns
over the head. Remember we
played a game we (with) E-1
we won them. Remember we had
Cristmas party's in the class
room we had a Cristmas
tree and we had a (all) the
girls dacneing. Miss R was
dacneing we the boys. You
and Rodert were untieing the
striig of the Cristmas
tree and it fell on my head.
Write dack Love James

The occasion of being in B-2 while his classroom is being recarpeted prompts James to think about his past experiences there with Alex. His use of "Do you remember" and "Remember" may perform a significant function in the writing process itself by helping him stay on target, calling up the memories. It seems to be a technique for moving the text along, for getting from one idea to the next. It also functions to actively engage the recipient. After two uses of the full phrase, just the single word is enough. And after three uses of the single word reminder, James' memory of the Christmas party, with all the details, comes flooding in so surely that there is no need to call attention to the recall process.

Like most boys his age, James writes about sports in his letters. But unlike many others, James' concerns go beyond the mere fact of playing, or even winning. In (2) he is concerned with the position he is going to play in hockey, and the need for practice if the team he and John are on is going to win.

2) March 27, 1982
Dear John
arent you happy we
are going to play
hocking. But there is
still one problem we
do not kown yet who
is going to play
senter foword. I never
play senter foword but
I still want to win the
hockey trofee and we
butter pratus hard.
I think we are going to
lose the trofee. We better
pratus. Your friend
James G.

It is not clear whether or not James thinks he can help his team if he plays center forward, but he is definitely focusing on what the team must do in order to win, a certain lack of precision notwithstanding. A letter can function to inspire team spirit. (Notice James' spelling of know in the seventh line here: "kown". Previously he has written "now". Now, although he has lost the appropriate vowel sound, he has supplied the "silent" k, a significant step toward the standard spelling.)

In another letter written on March 27, 1982, James chastises Manuel F. for not showing up at hockey practice to help the team out as its goalie. His concern with winning is still evident, and it is apparent that James thinks it is acceptable to express his anger in a letter. But if he can express anger, he can also demonstrate his understanding of fair play. In another letter to John, also about sports, he tries to arrange an exchange which will draw on both his and John's strengths. This letter appears as (3).

3) Jan 11 1982
Dear John
will you so (show)
me how to
be a good
dodgeball
player. If you
show me I
will show
you how to
kick hard
and be a
good player
in kickball.
Your my friend.
Your friend
James

With diplomacy, a letter can be used to persuade someone to act in one's own interest.

While many children make requests of the people they write to, James is more precise, provides more details about the context of the event, than most. In one instance (See Section 3.4, No. 4), he tells of his plan to give a ball to a friend, describing a mark on the ball and how the mark is different from the one on his own ball. In (4) he is precise in proposing a small business deal.

4) March 16 1982
Dear Julio
are you going to sell
the rubeck cube. I will
buy you it for

a dollar.
Your friend James

In addition to sports and games, the academic performance and classroom behavior of his friends are recurrent topics in James' letters. (5) is illustrative of his concern with classroom behavior.

5) september 22 1981
Dear Keith
why are you so lasy
in the class when the teacher
tell you don't lessen to the
teacher Heres a picture of you lasy
(pic)
why do you take oof your shoe at home
white back love James

While it is possible to interpret this letter as being quite critical, it is not clear at all how James intended it. He might be asking honest questions, or perhaps offering friendly advice. When he spoke in the interview about how writing letters differed from other school writing, he said at one point, "...you make new friends, sometimes you break up with other friends..." Typically when a child "breaks up" with another in a letter, he or she is very direct: "You are not my friend." There are no letters of that sort from James in the data. James closes his letter to Keith by asking him to write back, and signs it "Love". Those are not the gestures of someone who is ending a friendship. It seems reasonable to conclude that James' intent is not to offend, but rather to be of help. A similar conclusion is appropriate for the letter to Manuel R. in (6), where academic performance is the focus.

6) Jan 14, 1982
Dear
Manual R. how
are you going to finish

your Rreading. I hope
you finish your Reading
because your in big
trouble because if you
don't finish your
your things at the
right time you will
get in trouble.
You are my best
friend I ever
had in my
classroom. You never
call me names ore
you never teas me
You are my best friend
friend
James

The juxtaposition of this strong affirmation of friendship to the discussion of Manuel's completion of his reading serves to eliminate the likelihood of ill intent in what might otherwise seem offensive.

The letter to Manuel in (6) introduces another topic that is of concern to James, and that is name calling. In three letters on this same day, James wrote about name calling, in each case asking one of his classmates why he is called a particular name and offering some kind of help or consolation. The letter to Benjie in (7) illustrates.

7) Jan 14 1982
Dear Benjie
way do they
call you dog.
If they call
you call you
benjie the dog
just tell the
teacher they were
calling you
names. Well
John got the
pretty flower
so what John
can keep that
old flower.
So what you

look better than
John you look
like Shierlook
homes. In way
you are my best
friend Benjie
friend
James

Here James' offer of help is the suggestion that Benjie tell the teacher if "they" call him names. He also seems to be consoling Benjie about not getting the pretty flower that John got by telling him that he looks better than John, in fact like "Shierlook homes". Although the punctuation indicates that Benjie is James' best friend "in way", it also seems possible that the period was misplaced, and that James thinks Benjie looks like Sherlock Holmes in a way instead. However, it is certainly possible that James has in mind a way of qualifying his best friendship with Benjie. While James unquestionably does say things that other children do not, he also quite clearly demonstrates sensitivity to their feelings.

James had five or six days during the school year when he was very prolific, and January 14, 1982, when he wrote the letters in (6) and (7), was one of them. On that day he wrote nine letters to as many people. As mentioned above, three of them involved the issue of name calling. Two others, including to one to Manuel R. in (6), focused on classroom performance. Yet across these topics each of the letters was so carefully designed for the recipient that there was no hint of repetition. Often when less proficient writers write more than one letter in a sitting, the second is very nearly a duplicate of the first. James' skill allows him more versatility. Another concern of James on January 14, 1982, a recurrent concern throughout the year, was getting a letter in return. He wrote a number of follow-up letters during the year as (8) illustrates.

8) Jan 14, 1982
Dear George
You got my letter
I send you. I hope
you did. George I
think when we to to
cottarsam (?) I can't
jump over the fence
because when we
did jump over the
fence my pants
got a little
bit wrip. So what.
Did you got my
letter. I think
I can't jump
over the fence
because my
pants wer a little
bit wrip. Your
a good dogeball
player your my friend
friend
James

Twice here James asks whether George has received a previous letter. It is difficult to determine his purpose in referring to his ripped pants and the problem of not going over the fence. If his primary intent is to motivate George to write to him, his method is indirect. He neither requests a letter nor pointedly asks George something he can write back about.

It would be interesting to know the sequence in which James wrote his letters of January 14, 1982. While some of them are quite pointed in purpose (whether or not the intent is unambiguously inferrable), others are less clear. In (9) he seems to let his thoughts flow, stream of consciousnessfashion.

9) Jan 14, 1982
Dear Glen
this is the first time I
ever wrote to you. I ever
never had wrote to you
most of the time because
the teacher doesn't give
us a little bit of time.
The teacher is a little
bit of mean but I think
she not so mean because
she lits us have P.E.
Teachers are fun
to be around with
us. The teacher makes
lots of good
things to do in
school. Some people
have lots of fun
your friend
James

While it is possible to trace how each thought in this letter led to the next, doing so is beyond the present purpose. The point is to demonstrate that here, unlike many children, James is not hindered by perfectionism. He thinks as he goes and feels free to change his mind along the way.

On another day when he wrote several letters, he wrote one to Julio in which he told him he had played all the video games (in a particular arcade) and that he had also drawn them. Then he wrote the letter in (10) to Manuel F., who is generally recognized as the class artist.

10) March 17, 1982
Dear Manuel F
I wrote a letter to
Julio and I told
him that I did all
off the video and
I draw them and
color the(m) all
can you draw video games.
your friend James

The question arises as to why James wanted to inform Manuel of his letter to Julio, and the answer is not readly apparent. Sometimes he seems to write without any identifiable purpose, almost as though the content of his message is rather beside the point. His purpose, perhaps, is to write a lot of letters. On the other hand, the question to Manuel about whether or not he is able to draw video games is highly appropriate, because of the class-wide recognition of his artistic talent Manuel has received.

In the interview James said that one of the reasons he likes to write letters is to make friends. Writing letters, he also said, makes him feel happy and attached to friends. In (11) he offers help and information to a boy who comes to his class for reading in a direct effort to make friends.

11) Dear Gillarmo
do you
no wher
I sit down
for late reading
why don't
you sit
in the
sit in the
emty desk.
You now
wher I sit
next to
me ther
is a emty
desk so
you can
put in your
things.
Will you
be my
friend

James is concerned with maintaining his sense of connection to adults through the postal system, as well as to peers. Early in the year he comes to the defense of his principal with the letter in (12).

12) september 22 1981
Dear Mr. K,
you are the tallest
principul in colmar school
some people say you have
sticks. I said he a tall man
(pic)
love James
wite back

'Sticks' here is in all probability to be translated as 'stilts'. Since Mr. K is the only principal at Colmar, he is without a doubt the tallest, but it is also true that he is tall, a fact not missed by the students who are under his authority.

Another adult with whom James made an effort to maintain contact was Ms M, the reading specialist. In February Ms M was promoted to a district level position, and James, as well as many of the other fourth graders, wrote to ask her to come back to do Junior Great Books discussions with them. A rather lenghthy correspondence developed between James and Ms M (a total of eleven letters, seven of which were from James), marked by delays in delivery because two postal systems (Colmar Mail and the district's interoffice mail) were being used, rather than just one. The letter in (13) is James' first letter to Ms M after her departure from Colmar.

13) March 5, 1982
Dear Ms M
thank you for the
2 years we had
with you. How

are you in
youre new school
do you have
your own office.

Ms M when
are you comeing
back for Juinor
Great Books
Descusin. You
saw me in
the treller (trailer) wher
all of those boxes
wher all your
what were in
all off those boxes.
I hope you
come back to
colmr school
and stay with us.
We all love you
(James)

By March 16 James had not heard from Ms M, so he wrote to her again, the letter in (14). His concern for her welfare has intensified, and his request for her to return for a Junior Great Books discussion has gone from a direct question as to when she is coming, to an indirect statement about waiting for her.

14) Mar 16, 1982
Dear Ms M
how are you I hope
you fine in the
office I hope
you all right.
Some of us
are waiting for
you so we
can have Junior
Great Books
Will you right
back so we
now your
all right.
Love
James

Unbeknownst to James, Ms M was writing to him on the very day that he wrote the letter in (14) to her. Soon he had two letters from her, and this was occasion to write about hearing from her to his friend Benjie. The letter is in (15).

15) March 27, 1982
Dear Benjie
I rote to Ms
M. Benjie I got
allready got two
letters from Ms M.
I got two letters
from Ms M
how many
letters have
you get from
Ms M
On my letter she
said if Ms R
calls her for Juinor
Great Book she will come
Your friend
James

James' pride and happiness make him sound a bit boastful. Certainly two letters from an important grown up is delicious abundance, and James is fairly sure that he is one-up on Benjie. It is important to note that it is not just the fact of hearing from Ms M that pleases him, but also the fact that he can report what she said, namely that she will come for a Junior Great Books discussion if their teacher asks her. One of James' purposes in writing letters is to get action. After a lot of inaction during the year, he is probably proud of what he perceives to be his role in getting Ms M back.

Any sample of James' letters is bound to miss interesting and informative things that he said, and this one is no exception. However, it is at least illustrative of the range of topics and functions he employed as a fourth grader. In the interview he seemed to be aware of a functional difference between the United States mail and Colmar Mail. The former, he thought, allowed people to report urgent personal news to friends and relatives who lived some distance away, whereas

Colmar Mail did not have such an important built-in function. More than most children, James was exploring the potential uses of a school-based postal system. While his writing is in decided need of the development and application of editing skills, James' willingness to use letter writing to explore and test his relationships with people is unusual. Writing, for him, has become a useful and valuable tool.

2.5 Caridad. Caridad is a bilingual third grader in Mr. D's classroom. Although Spanish is her first language, she does not, she says in the interview, know how to write in Spanish. Most of her literacy instruction has been in English. Her teacher thinks that she was pushed a little too hard too early to move into English reading, and that this has caused her unnecessary difficulty with phonics activities in reading and with spelling in general. While it is certainly true that Caridad is not an accomplished speller, her difficulty does not diminish the pleasure she finds in using the postal system. She invents her spellings as she needs them, and while she willingly accepts correction when it is given, no need for perfection prevents her from getting things written. She loves to write letters, and, even more, she loves to receive them. Caridad is of particular interest, however, not only for what she writes, but also for her ability to use the postal system to fulfill her social and personal needs. In the interview she reveals a conscious awareness of social aspects of language use that most children possess but do not articulate. The following brief description of her letters is designed to provide the contextual background for a discussion of the postal system as a cultural tool in Caridad's life, which is the major focus of this section.

In contrast to James, whose letters are quite varied in topic and function, Caridad's letters are noticeably repetitive. Of the twenty letters in the data pool she wrote to peers, eleven begin with the statement "I like you because," followed by a reason. The letter to Marisela in (1) is Caridad's prototype, the original, stripped down form.

1) 3-82
Dear Marisela,
I like you because
you are nice to me,
write me back good
bye (pic)
love
Caridad

Caridad does vary her prototype, however, and her thoughts often go far beyond simple affirmations of friendship. The letter in (2), for example, written to her closest friend, reflects a somewhat sophisticated view of friendship.

2) 4-19-82
Dear Norma
I like you because
you are nice to
me and when
you get mad at
me we get back
to geter and
this is me
(pic)
Love
Caridad

Caridad acknowledges that deciding what to say in a letter is difficult. At one point in the interview she says, "Sometimes, um, when they write to me, I hardly know what to say, so sometimes I write the same thing." It is not clear whether she means that she writes the same thing that was written to her, or the same thing that she usually writes. Whatever the case, she is aware of the difficulty of deciding what to say, and of her customary way of coping with it. When asked what kinds of things she says in a letter, she replies, "I say, like for example, 'Dear Norma, I like you because you are nice to me and, um, here is a picture for you.' And I do the picture for her and then I go, 'Your best friend, Cari.' And then I fold it, and then I do a picture on the back."

In one of the rare letters in which Caridad does not speak directly of liking her addressee, the feeling is stongly implied, in (3).

3) 8, 1981
Dear ALma
I hope you bring your homework
so you won't get a check
and write me back.
good by ALma
(pic)
your friend
Caridad M.

In another letter Caridad registers a complaint and makes a request, all in aid of setting a friendship right.

4) 1-4-82
Dear Zoraya,
I like you but you always
play with Norma and you don't play
with me and please play
with me now and I will
like you and write me
bake good by Zoraya
Love
Caridad

(Notice the alignment of the date and greeting in (4). Caridad had drawn her own lines for indicating the placement of the letter parts on an unlined Christmas card that was part of Colmar's holiday stationery.)

Pictures are an important part of Caridad's letters. She draws them on all of her letters, even if there is no picture box on the stationery and she has to draw over the lines meant for writing. If the primary purpose of writing is to affirm friendships, the offering of a picture is an important part of the entire gesture.

It should not be assumed that because Caridad is exclusively concerned with friendship in her letters to her friends that she writes all of her letters about friendship. She has a keen sense of audience, of what it is appropriate to say to whom. One of the most noteworthy instances in which this is revealed is her letter to the Great Pumpkin.

It is the custom at Colmar to write to the various traditional holiday characters. While Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny have been the subject of centuries of lore and their identities are well established, the Great Pumpkin is a newcomer on the scene. No one is quite sure just who he or she is. There are those students who stay with the familiar "You are my best friend," in their letters. For those who are curious about the identity of the Great Pumpkin, the most obvious conclusion to draw is that he or she is the bearer of candy, since the quest for candy is the focus of Hallowe'en for most children. And, indeed, many children write to ask for candy. A handful of children go beyond the obvious in an effort to uncover significant information about just who this character might really be, and Caridad is one of this small group. She gets right to the heart of the matter with the letter in (5).

5) 10-15
Dear Great Pumpkin
I have a question
and here it
comes do you
have powers! please
answer me back
(pic)
Caridad M.

Caridad calls attention to her question, first, by announcing it and, second, by punctuating it with an exclamation point. She has identified a key issue and does not want it to slip by unnoticed.

To her teacher Caridad writes to ask "If I'm gonna pass grade and if I do good work." In letters to her principal and the former reading specialist, who had moved to another school, she is concerned with making her identity known to her addressees. In a sense she is testing to find out if she is recognized. These letters, too, in (6) and (7), reflect her awareness of her audience.

6) 11-19
Dear Mr. K
remember when you saw
me at the monkey bars
my name is Cari good
by Mr. K
write me back.
(pic)
Caridad M

7) 2-7-82
Dear Ms. M
I like you. Maybe You don't know me
but I know you. My name is Carry
write me back. the End
(pic)
love
Carry

(Caridad seems to be exploring her sense of self in another way in these two letters. She is experimenting with the spelling of her nickname. As well as "Caridad", she is "Cari", and "Carry" here. Another variation she uses during the year is "Carriy.")

In addition to possessing audience awareness, Caridad has a strong sense of linguistic appropriateness, of the interpersonal aspects of language use. In the interview, when asked if she has ever expressed anger to anyone in a letter, she tells of being angry with Lupe for calling her names.

> ...so the next day we had letters and I wrote her a letter. (I said) "To Lupe." I didn't write "Dear Lupe." Instead I wrote "To Lupe," because I was mad at her. I wrote "To Lupe: Lupe, don't call me names no more. Or else." And then I put my name.

She does not open a letter to someone she is mad at with "Dear." Similarly, she reports not signing a letter to her mother's male friend with "Love." That will happen when she knows him better.

Caridad is sensitive to nuances of language use and able to use the postal system to meet her personal and social needs. While the range of things she says to her friends is narrow, the basic function of letter writing in her life is similar to the function of the friendly letter for adults, except that adults are generally concerned with relationships with friends or relatives some distance away.

Caridad is outstanding among her peers for the extent to which she has integrated writing letters into her daily life. In the interview she tells of taking school stationery home and writing letters there, because she does not have time to write all she wants to at school. She describes putting real street addresses on her letters, giving them a touch more validity than the classroom addresses used at Colmar. Then she runs to her friends' houses to deliver the letters, being careful to avoid being seen. Writing and delivering letters is part of Caridad's free time fun. She demonstrates her control of using the postal system by changing the rules to suit her purposes.

Receiving letters is very important to Caridad, too. It is a measure of her popularity. When asked in the interview what her favorite kind of writing to do in school is, she responds by saying "Letters." When asked what she likes about writing letters, she immediately focuses on the receiving end of the process: "I like it when they write me back, and then, the pictures that they draw." The letters she receives become fond mementos. During a lull in school work, she takes her letters out of her desk and rereads her favorites. She says she likes to get long letters better than short ones because there is more to read at such times. She describes taking thirty-eight of them home, putting some up on the refrigerator. Others she put in her dresser, up very high where her two little sisters can't get to them. Her mother wishes she would throw them away because there are so many, but she wants to save them so that "When I grow up I could see the letters that they sen' me." Clearly, Caridad's letters are valued possessions.

One letter she received was from a boy, and this was a very big event, the first time it had ever happened. When asked what the letter said, she replies, "He told me that I play a lot with Norma and things like that." And, indeed, he did. The letter, which she carefully saved, is in (8).

8) 9-28
Dear Caridad
tu juegas
con norma
y con Alma
tambien y
ustedes juegan
a tedrball and
camprop and
yu play alot
with Zoraya tu
yuo ar norma
best frend
love
Eliseo

(Dear Caridad
you play
with Norma
and with Alma
too and
you play
tetherball and
jumprope and
you play a lot
with Zoraya too
you are Norma's
best friend.
love
Eliseo)

What Eliseo wrote is wholly appropriate in Caridad's eyes. This is the letter she identifies as her favorite among all that she has received, because "It was the first time that a boy wrote to me," and "It's so important to me, and like, it seems as if that boy cares about me, and things like that."

Caridad is a child who has tried on the postal system and found a good fit. Writing and receiving letters enables her to use and develop her sensitivity to language use. It also fulfills important social and personal needs for her, and enhances her self image. It seems certain that as Caridad's writing abilities develop, her use of the postal system will grow in depth and variety. The postal system truly is a functional cultural tool for her, which at once helps her grow and reflects her growth.

PART THREE: CORRESPONDING

3.0 Introduction. The notion that writing can be interactive is not necessarily obvious to children being taught to write in school. That is an idea which, for some students, evolves in time, as they gain experience using the postal system. As it turns out, however, it is quite possible for children to correspond, in the sense that they exchange letters, without writing interactively at all. This is not to suggest that it is possible to correspond without interacting in some way. The key to the matter is the level at which the interaction takes place, whether face to face in the classroom, embedded in the content of the letters, or somewhere in between.

Increasingly, researchers (eg., Harste, Burke, and Woodward, 1981) are noticing that young children who are acquiring oral and written language competence, are not using subcategories of adult models. Rather, they engage in the same language processes, eg., listening, speaking, reading, writing, that adults do, but they feed different data into the processes (Farr, 1983). In the case of corresponding, it can be said that, from their first efforts, children are engaged in an interactive process, just as adults who correspond with friends are. The difference, again, is the level at which the interaction takes place.

In order to understand what is involved as children feed increasingly sophisticated data into their corresponding, it helps to have in mind a picture of the interactive process adults engage in when they correspond with friends. At its most basic, adult corresponding requires that some person, A, write a letter to another person, B, and that B respond by writing a letter to A. A's letter prompts B's response. This structural framework is supported by several important underpinnings. Presumably A writes to B for a reason, and the reaon influences what A writes about and the style and tone he or she employs. The reason for the friendly letter is typically to maintain contact over a distance, and the method involves informal talk about topics assumed to be of mutual interest. Finding topics of mutual interest involves self-reflection and perspective taking. At a minimum B's letter to A "connects" to A's by acknowledging it (eg, "Thanks for your letter."). This is a surface level connection to be distinguished from a deeper level of connecting which involves incorporation of or collaboration on a topic which A introduced (Ochs and Schieffelin, 1976). Incorporation of or collaboration on a topic between writers results in continuous, or interactive, discourse. The terms 'continuous' and 'interactive' are essentially interchangeable.

Adult corresponding does involve taking turns. And it is possible for the locus of the interaction to be more in the turn taking than in the discourse itself. A writes to B about his concerns, and B writes to A about his, with a minimum of overlap. Many correspondences between friends are on-going, however, with each correspondent's turn consisting of some new topics and some continuation of old ones. The turn-taking is like spoken conversation in its informal, interactive nature, yet different in that each turn is typically longer and covers a wider range of topics. Experience is required in order for writers to learn to control these longer, more compicated turns.

Of course, the rules for corresponding are slightly different at Colmar, because children were writing to people they saw every day. It was natural that face to face interaction would play a part in their corresponding. The fact that interaction took place on other levels than in the discourse itself made the process of identifying the instances of corresponding somewhat difficult. A certain amount of detective work was required, and, because of the difficulty involved, there is a good chance that the detective work is incomplete. However, four general categories of corresponding fell out as all the identifiable instances were sorted.

The four categories may be roughly described as follows. In the first, children agree orally to write a letter to one another on the same day. While the writing grows out of the interaction, the interaction is primarily oral rather than written. In the second category, the letters are written on different days, but the proximity of their dates (or another clue, such as holiday or special occasion stationery) is the only indication that A's letter probably motivated B's "response." As in the first category, there is no written interaction in the second. In the third category, interaction appears in the letters, but it is located at the turn-taking level rather than at the actual letter content level. B may thank A for his or her letter, or otherwise acknowledge receipt of it, but makes no reference to anything A said. Finally in the fourth category, there is interaction in the content of the letter, i.e., interactive discourse, typically about a single topic which A initiated.

I have used the word category consciously in order to avoid the implication of stages which children must go through sequentially from the first to the last. And yet clearly in the ordering of the categories, there is evidence of growth from more concrete to more abstract, from contextualization of the interaction to decontextualization. The locus of the interaction is increasingly remote from the child and embedded in the writing itself. Among the Colmar students who participated in the research project, none went through each of the four categories sequentially, as if they were developmental stages. However, each child who reached the final category and did not start out there at the beginning of the year, passed through at least one of the first three in preparation for the last.

3.1 Simultaneous Corresponding. When two children agree to write to one another at the same time, they gain assurance that their efforts, at the moment of writing, are yielding a return effort. Being able to eliminate any question as to whether or not a letter will get a response is a definite strong point, perhaps particularly in a world where the teacher may not allow time for letter writing when a person needs it.

Often simultaneous correspondences are about the same topic, probably growing out of a recent or even current conversation. Missy and Wendy's letter in (1) illustrate.

1a) Dec 9
Dear Missy
are you Rodney's
friend I am
are you how are
you doing in math
I'm doing fine
No yes
☐ ☐
(Wendy) (Mrs. F, 3)

b) 12/9/81
Dear Wendy
Do you like
Rodney I like
him I hope
you do like him
all the girls do but
Sonia likes gabriel
from
No Yes
☐ ☐
Missy (Mrs. F, 3)

Wendy and Missy's letters share not only a comon topic, but also a common form, the yes/no question with the yes/no answer boxes for the response.

Seven of the eleven instances of simultaneous corresponding occurred in Mr. D's class. While it might be possible to hypothesize a reason for this based on the nature of the classroom context in which the postal system operates, it is probably more to the point that five of these correspondences involve a single student, Caridad. In (2) Caridad and Margaret write to one another, with Caridad, as usual, telling why she likes her addressee.

2a) 8, 1981
Dear Margaret
I like you because you are
nice to me and you are nice
to Norma to good by margart
(pic)
Your friend,
Caridad (Mr. D, 3)

b) 10-8 1981
Caridad
Dear Caridad,
I like to watch
you play tetherball
(pic)
Your friend
Margaret (Mr. D, 3)

Margaret's letter focuses on observation rather than participation, perhaps reflecting a feeling of distance from, or admiration of, Caridad.

In (3) it may be that Caridad has influenced the content of Zoraya's letter, since Zoraya does not usually tell her addressee why she likes her.

3a) Sept 17,1981
Dear Zoraya
I like you becaues you are
funny but I still like you
becaues you are fun to play
with and I like you. the End
(pic)
love Caridad (Mr. D, 3)

b) Sept. 17. 1981.
Dear Caridad
I like you because you are
nice to me. Cari you are my
best friend
(pic)
Love
Zoraya (Mr. D, 3)

Caridad and Norma are good friends who write to one another many times during the school year. Two of these occasions for writing appear to be instances of simultaneous corresponding, in which holiday giving is the concern.

4a) 12-3
Dear Norma
I like you because
you are nice to me
and I already have your
present Merry " Merry
Christmas
THE END
(pic)
Love Caridad (Mr. D, 3)

b) 12-3
Dear Caridad
I like you very
much and are
you going to get
presents. I might
give you one. and
have a merry christmas
(pic)
love Norma
your friend

5a) 2-16-82
Dera Norma
I got you a valentine card
did you get one for me? I hope
you did write me backe.
(pic)
Love
Cari (Mr. D, 3)

b) 2-16-82
Dear Caridad
You are nice to me and I
like you and are
you going to Bring Valentine cards.
(pic)
Your friend
Norma (Mr. D, 3)

Later in the year Caridad and Norma write to each other on the same day, but this time the correspondence is markedly different from the earlier ones. The interactive nature of the writing, as well as the absence of an address on the second letter, provide evidence that the postal system is being used for passing notes in class.

6a) 6-3-82

Dear Norma
I wont to be
your friend but I
can't and don't tock to
me evr agen write
me back
(pic)
Love
Carry (Mr. D, 3)

b) 6-3-82
Dear cari
why can't I talk
to you could I
talk to you in
class
(pic)
your friend
Norma

(Caridad's letter in (6a) provides interesting data for the ongoing effort to understand what writing is for children. For her, writing and talking seem to have different functions; during a fight talking is not acceptable, whereas writing is. Perhaps it the appeal of privateness of writing, in contrast to the publicness of speaking, that enables her to continue communicating with her friend in writing during their fight (Farr, personal communication).)

Corresponding on the same day is not characteristic only of the younger writers. Fourth graders Judith and Beatriz engage in it early in the year, and here the writing does not even seem to grow out of verbal interaction in the classroom.

7a) 9-15-81
Para Beatriz
tu eres mi amiga y yo
soy tu amiga y tu eres mi
mejor amiga y tu eres
buena con migo y yo quiero
que seas mi mejor amiga
(pic)
yo te quiero porque tu eres buena
(Judith) (Ms R, 4)

For Beatriz
you are my friend and I
am your friend and you are my
best friend and you are
good with me and I would love
for you to be my best friend
(pic)
I love you because you are nice
(Judith)

b) Sept 15 1981
Dear Judith
I like To
play Tetherball plus
you het har and I
like you for a friend
(pic)
Beatriz (Ms R, 4)

It is possible, of course, that Judith and Beatriz' writing to one another is due purely to coincidence. (Beatriz did, in fact, write another letter to Judith two days later in which she seems to respond to Judith's affirmation of friendship, as well as reiterating her enjoyment of tetherball.)

Two other fourth graders, Liz and her friend Patricia, each wrote four letters to one another on January 21, during their postal center time. For Liz and other students participating in the research project, both sending and receiving large quantities of letters took on importance at this mid point in the year. There was a competitive surge of letter writing. Although it is impossible to be certain of the order of Liz and Patricia's letters on January 21st, one pair does apparently contain interactive discourse, in (8).

8a) 1/21
Dear Liz
To Liz I like you
for a friend and how
do you like the candy
that I got you. You are
a special girl to me
and I will be glad

to get you a (illegible)
That's all I have to
say to you
(Pat) (Ms R, 4)

b) Jan 21, 1982
(Pat)
I'm sorry for what
I said and thanks
for the candy It
is good and I really
am sorry and I hope
you will forgive me
for what I said and
I like you a lot.
(pic)
by your
Freind Liz (Ms R, 4)

Patricia's other letters on January 21st are all affirmations of friendship. Liz' letters contain questions about school related matters (eg., "Do you like this school?" and "Do you want to be a tutor?"), which Patricia does not answer in writing. There is the sense that most of the interaction between Liz and Patricia takes place face to face, in the classroom, and that just a small portion of it is contained in their writing.

It appears that simultaneous writing by agreement, without interactive discourse, is an access to corresponding which some children choose to use. At the outset it grows out of oral interaction, enabling the writer to feel a sense of working in the here and now, and it assures each writer of a "response." Simultaneous corresponding may grow into traditional note passing or more mature kinds of corresponding, yet it always remains an option, and may be returned to when new goals, such as generating a quantity of letters, become important.

3.2 Sequential Corresponding Without Continuous Discourse.

The second category of corresponding involves instances where the proximity of dates indicates that the receipt of the earlier letter may have in some sense caused the writing of the latter. Because children often omit dates, it is difficult to distinguish correspondences which fall into this category from instances of simultaneous corresponding. But, fuzzy as the demarcation lines may be, this category is real, and interesting because the recipient of the first letter responds without giving any indication of having received it. There is neither acknowledgement of the letter, nor interactive discourse. The letters in (1) illustrate this category of corresponding.

1a) septiembre-22 1981
Querido Andy
Andy tu eres mi mejor
amigo tu juegas con
migo y con Orlando
y con Carlos D
(pic)
con amor
Eliseo (Mr. D, 3)

(September-22 1981
Dear Andy
Andy you are my best
friend you play with
me and with Orlando
and with Carlos D
(pic)
with love
Eliseo)

b) 9-23
Eliso
Dear Eliseo
I like When
We play KicKball
(pic)
mi amigo
Andy (Mr. D, 3)

While it may not be mere coincidence that Andy's letter, like Eliseo's, is concerned with play, there is no indication of interactive writing.

The correspondence in (2) takes place between students in different classrooms.

2a) Oct 8 1981.
Dear Susi
Susi yo soy tu amiga
I Veronica esta in mi
clase yo te mado esta
cart para que me
quontestes
(pic)
quirira susi
Karla (Ms G, 2)

(Oct 8 1981.
Dear Susi
Susi I am your friend
And Veronica is in my
class I am sending you this
letter so that you will
answer me
(pic)
dear susi
Karla)

b) October 13 1981
Karle yo
te quiero mucho
puedes ir a mi casa
a ora
di le a tu mama
i a tu papa
que si puedes
ir a mi casa
Susy (Mrs. F, 2)
tu amiga

(October 13 1981
Karle I
love you a lot
can you go to my house
now
tell your mother
and your father
if you can
go to my house
Susy

your friend)

Karla says that she is writing so that Susy will answer her, yet she does not ask any questions or make any statements that directly require a response. Apparently to her, a letter itself, apart from its content, is sufficient to warrant a response. Susy (Note her use of 'tell' rather than 'ask,' as observed in the writing of other Spanish and English speaking students.) responds to the spirit of Karla's letter, without any linking of discourse.

It does not seem justified to conclude that all respondents whose letters fall into this category are unable to write interactively. For some children, sending a letter is much like giving a gift, and while the giver may hope for something in return, he or she does not expect the two gifts to connect in any way. Fourth graders, as well as the younger students, do this type of corresponding, as (3) shows.

3a) JaNuary 11, 1982
Querido Jaems
Jaems tu eres mi mejor
amigo y poresa te mado
esta cart y Juegas muy bien
querido amigo
(pic)
Manual R
tu amigo (Ms R, 4)

(JaNuary 11, 1982
Dear Jaems
James you are my best
friend and so I am sending you
this letter and you play very well
dear friend
(pic)
Manual R
your friend

b) Jan 14, 1982
Dear
Maunal R how

are you going to finish
your Rreading. I hope
you finish your Reading
because your in big
trouble because if you
don't finish your
things at the
right time you will
get in trouble.
You are my best
friend I ever
had in my
classroom. You never
call me names ore
you never teas me
You are my best friend
friend
James (Ms R, 4)

After his warning to Manual, James does pick up the friendship theme that is the main thrust of Manual's letter. Because affirmations of friendship are so frequent in the data, it is virtually impossible to say whether this is in response to Manual's letter, or, for example, an effort by James to explain why he felt free to issue the warning. (See the discussion of James' use of the postal system in Section 2.4.) Similarly, Jose's motivation for issuing the affirmation of friendship in (4b) is unclear.

4a) October 12 1981
Dear Munchy (Jose)
You are my best
friend so you can
youes my makers (markers?)
so you can
Here is a picture of
you in the store
(pic) cute
Whrite back
love James (Ms R, 4)

b) October 14, 1981
Dera James
James you are my
best best firend. you did
not pick me on
today. Lets play tag

(pic)
Your friend Jose (Ms R, 4)

In Jose's letter the affirmation of friendship seems so automatic that it might be a response to a greeting, as when two acquaintances in a work situation pass one another, one says "Hello," and the other replies "Hello." It is possible to infer a complex relationship between the affirmation of friendship and the complaint which follows it, such that the affirmation of friendship provides a reason why the thing complained about should not have occurred, but it is impossible to know if setting up that inference was Jose's intent, or whether, in making the affirmation of friendship, he was simply responding in kind to the spirit of James' letter.

3.3 Acknowledging Receipt of a Letter. In the two kinds of correspondence that have been discussed up to this point, there is no direct indication that the second letter is a response to the first. The third category marks a distinct break from the first two in that here the respondent makes direct reference to receipt of a letter. And typically this is the only way in which the two letters connect. (1) and (2) are classic examples of third and fourth graders, respectively.

1a) Oct.1
Dear Eliseo
Dear Eliseo your
My best friend. When ever
we're going to
play kickball
I wish if you our
on my team
Andy (Mr. D, 3)

b) 10-3

Dear Andy
ya agarre tu
carta que me mendates
y yo quiero que
le mandes una
carta a Carlos D
y a Orlando tamdien
y vamos juara
cickball y tamdien
en lonche tamdien
vamo a jugar
en lonche comemos la comida
con amor
Eliseo (Mr. D, 3)

(10-3
Dear Andy
I already got your
letter that you sent me
and I want
you to send a
letter to Carlos D
and to Orlando too
and we are going to play
cickball and also
at lunch also
we are going to play
at lunch we eat together
con amor
Eliseo)

2a) 9/18
(Judith)
How are you? I am find
do you like the day today?
I like the day today
hos your best friend? My best
frend is Sandra
Good luck
by from
Veronica (Ms R, 4)

b) 9/23/1981
Veronica
gracias porque me
mandes te una carta
Veronica yo soi
Judith y qui si era
a ser tu amiga si
tu quieres a ser mi
amiga te tienes
que juntar con miga
yo quiero a ser tu
amiga Veronica
manda me una carta

porque sino me mandas
yo no te mando manda
me una carta
Judith (Ms R, 4)

9/23/1981
(Veronica)
thank you for
sending me a letter
Veronica I am
Judith and I would like
to be your friend if
you want to be my
friend you have
to get together with me
I want to be your
friend Veronica
send me a letter
because if you don't send me one
I won't send you one send
me a letter
Judith)

Judith's letter may actually respond, somewhat indirectly, to the content of Veronica's letter, too. If Judith feels left out of Veronica's friendship with Sandra, she could be understood as making a rather strong plea for friendship with Veronica herself.

Luz' response to James in (3) is outstanding for its absence of both a response to his offer and an answer to his question. However, the intervention of five days, with all the potential for face to face interaction, may have made direct responses irrelevant.

3a) March 26, 1982
Dear Luz
do you want I
ball. I will give you
one. I will give you
a ball with a
red line on it.
Luz are you going to see the
Wisserd of Oz. It is a 8:00
on challen 2.
Your friend James (Ms R, 4)

b) 3/31
Dear James
Hi I got the letter you
gave me and I want to
be in the classroom at Suva
because you are a good friend
to me and I get to go now good by
James
Love Luz (Ms R, 4)

Telling James she wants to be in his classroom next year because he is a good friend may be Luz' indirect means of expressing gratitude for his generosity.

(4) and (5) offer the opportunity to compare correspondences between the same children early and late in the year. Manual R was trying to learn to speak and write English at the beginning of the year and the strain took its toll on his writing, as shown in (4a). When he started writing in Spanish, his writing improved markedly, in (5a).

4a) 9-22-81

ay jaem
me en Jens
we play
spanes hash
bool your
fren Manual R (Ms R, 4)

(Dear James
me and James
we play
Spanish dodge'
ball your
friend Manual R)

b) October 12, 1981
Dear Manual R
I got your letter and
I got it and I read it.
You are my best friend
and I like you very much
Here is a picture of you and me
playing a game
White Back?
love your friend James (Ms R, 4)

5a) June 23, 1982
querido james
te mando esta carta
porque tu eres mi me
jor amigo dime
si siempre vas a
jugar socer en la
carta que me mandes
tu querido
amigo Manual R (Ms R, 4)

(June 23, 1982
Dear James
I am sending you this letter
because you are my
best friend tell me
if you are always going to
play socer in the
letter you send me
your dear
friend Manual R)

b) June 25, 1982
Dear Manual R
I did get your
letter I know your
my best friend what
class room are you going to
I am going to room 403
good By
James (Ms R, 4)

Manual's letter in (5a) is significantly more mature than the one in (4a), and more elaborate than the one in Section 3.2, No. (3a). It is difficult to know whether his direct request for information, "Tell me if you are always going to play soccer in the letter you send me," is also intended as an indirect request for a letter, or whether he simply assumes that James will write back. Whatever the case, he has certainly learned to make writing work for him. James, in both of his letters in (4b) and (5b), acknowledges receipt of Manual's letters and affirms their friendship, but he does not seem to pay attention to any of Manual's mentions of sports. His statement in (4b) that he read Manual R's letter may be intended as reassurance to Manual that his letter was indeed decipherable. Such sensitivity on James' part is in contrast to his rather critical letter to Manual in Section 3.2, No. (3b).

By acknowledging receipt of a letter, a respondent is, in a sense, putting out a sign that "This is a correspondence." It is a key step in mastering the last of the formal rules of corresponding: A writes to B; then B writes back to A _because of_ A's letter. The next step is to bring the interaction into the writing itself.

3.4 Corresponding with Continuous Discourse.

In theory every respondent has a choice as to whether to continue a topic introduced by the initiator of the correspondence or to introduce one or more new topics himself. And yet, in reality, continuation of at least one topic from the initiating letter seems to be a feature that characterizes correspondences where there is a sense that the writer is comfortable using the postal system. Perhaps the best evidence for the case that continuation of one of the initiator's topics reflects growth comes from cases in which the respondent seems to be learning how, or exploring ways, to continue a topic. The first part of this section focuses on such instances.

The strategy which Carlos uses in (1) appears to be to copy what Phillip wrote, while adding more information.

1a) 9/81
Dear Carlos D
I am your Best
cosend
and we Play soccer

and Basbal
by soccer
(pic)
Phillip D (Mrs. F, 3)

b) Sept 17, 1981
Dear Phillip D
Yuo are my Best
cousin and we go to
yuor house and we Play
soccer and marbles and
baseball and catch
(pic)
love
Carlos D

Clearly this is not corresponding in any sophisticated sense, and yet Carlos' effort to stay on the topic Phillip introduced is unmistakable.

Julio's strategy for continuing the discourse in (2) is to draw a conclusion, or state an assumption about why Manual F wrote what he did.

2a) March 16, 1982
Dear Julio do you know that the Dodgers
played the Heaston astros and the dodgers
and they won 7-4
Manual F (Ms R, 4)

b) Manual you like the Dodgers because
the won the scrt 7-4
(Julio) (Ms R, 4)

In Ochs and Schieffelin's terms (1976), Julio incorporates Manual F's discourse topic into a new proposition. If he had answered Manual F's question, he would have collaborated on the topic. Julio's writing conveys his discomfort with the medium; what has been written to him very rigidly defines what he can write back.

Manual F's letter in (3) illustrates topic collaboration in a respondent's letter, this time with some elaboration.

3a) September 17, 1981

Dear Manual
as you know sugar-
ray won the fight sugar-
ray nocked him out 2 times
in the 13th and in the 14th
please write back. By
(pic)
your friend Miguel (Ms R, 4)

b) Sept 24,
Dear Migel
I no that sugar Ray
won the fit sugar Ray nock
down hearns 7th rown
sugar ray mest up hears
(pic)
Manual F (Ms R, 4)

The extent of Manual F's interaction with Miguel is actually considerable. First is his response to Miguel's "as you know" to open his letter. Miguel's use of the expression is quite unusual for a child of his age. Manual F reacts to it quite literally, responding to it much as if it were a question in need of an answer. Second, Manual F contributes the name of Sugar Ray's opponent in the fight, thus adding information that Miguel had omitted. And third, Manual F goes on to provide further details, designed either to correct Miguel, or to fill in more of the complete story.

Manual F's use of "I know" to respond to Miguel's "As you know," is illustrative of a successful, if somewhat awkward effort of a writer refer to something the initiator of the correspondence said. A slightly different sort of awkwardness appears in Jose's response to James in (4).

4a) March 26, 1982
Dear Jose A
I am going to give
Luz a ball. I am
going to give her
a ball with a
red mark. You now

how I have my ball with a
blue mark. I am going
to put a red mark on her ball
Your friend
James (Ms R, 4)

b) 3/30/82
Dear James
Hi How are you
to day I am fine.
I herd you are
going to give Luz
a ball. try to give
me a ball to. or let
me baro one
Goo-by
your firend
Jose A (Ms R, 4)

Now it may, of course, be true that, in addition to reading it in James' letter, Jose did actually hear in conversation with friends that James was going to give Luz a ball. There is no way of knowing. But since Jose is writing in response to James' letter, it is reasonable to assume that his choice of the verb 'hear' in "I herd you are going to give Luz a ball," is his method of acknowledging what James had written to him. Possibly this is a case of misplaced indirectness; Jose wants to make his request for a ball for himself as polite (indirect) as he can, but instead of attaching the indirectness to his request, he attaches it to the method by which he received the message about James' gift to Luz. In any case, Jose's responding to James' very direct message with "I herd," as if it had come from some unidentified or anonymous source, comes across as an inexperienced correspondent's practice at learning how to make reference to something written to him in a letter.

Because it is impossible to know how classroom interaction may have influenced each instance of written correspondence, as well as to understand how certain things that get written are actually intended, there is no clear line between what appear to be initial, slightly strained efforts to continue discourse, and more successful, mature ones. In the following examples, the manner in which something is said does not distract attention from or interfere with understanding of what is said, and this, at least from an adult point of view, is one of the best barometers of developing maturity, and naturalness in using the postal system.

In (5) Yvonne responds very positivley to the closing of the letter she received from Lily.

5a) Monday, September 14, 1981
To Yvonne
Yvonne you are pretty and
I wish you wer my best
frend and I like
How you right on spelling
Love is alwis
From Lily M (Ms R, 4)

b) Sept. 15, 1981
Dear Lily
Thank you very much
for your letter.
I liked when you
said love is always with
Lilly. I will be your
best friend now and
I will play teatherball
with you and Cindy.
One of these days I
will ask my mother
if you could come
over my house
Your new best friend
Love
Yvonne (Ms R, 4)

(Note how Yvonne uses the standard spelling of 'always,' rather than Lily's spelling. She is making the standard spelling available to Lily, and perhaps Lily will notice and learn it in this very personal context.) Yvonne also responds directly and affirmatively to Lily's wish (request) for best friendship, and makes promises in order to confirm the seriousness of her intent.

(6) is a correspondence between a third and fourth grader, Alma and Debby, respectively, in different classrooms. Alma has some difficulty with her letter, and there is the sense that Debby is trying to ease Alma's discomfort, to assure her that it doesn't matter.

6a) November 18 1981
Dear Debbie
Yuo are my best frind
and I play
tetherball white me
and I like to
play tetherball god
by Debbie
Your frend
Alma (Mr. D, 3)

b) November 25, 1981
Dear Alma D
how come you do not come to my house
to play tetherball with me ane we can
play a lot of games and we can play
with my friend Cindy at school and I
like to play with you because you are
very pretty and you are very nice
to me. and your mom is very nice
to me and you.
your friend
Debby G (Ms F, 4)

Debby's method of responding is to pick up Alma's tetherball theme by inviting her to her house to play (The invitational intent of "how come you do not come to my house..." is made clear by the following "...and we can play..."). While the fit of the two letters is not tight, with respect to interaction, the thematic linking is unmistakable, as is

Debby's interactional intent.

Some of the complexties of male-female relationships are the issue in (7). Karla has apparently written to Joseph before, without getting a response. In (7), after remarking on Joseph's progress with respect to kindness toward two members of the opposite sex, she lodges a complaint.

7a) 6-19-82
Joseph
Joseph you are geting
to be nice to me
and yesenia
When I rite to you
you don't answer me
just because I am
a Girl
(pic)
Love
Karla (Ms G, 2)

b) Dear Karla
I didn't wrate
back because Jesus
will say something
to me.
O.K. By
(pic)
from
Joseph (Ms G, 3)

Joseph acknowledges that Karla is essentially correct; he doesn't want his friend Jesus to know that he wrote to a girl because of the teasing it will cause. But while Joseph is explaining why he didn't write to Karla, there he is writing to her after all. Her second letter can not go ignored.

(8) contains three letters exchanged between two fourth grade girls who demonstrate the desire and ability to write interactively early in the year.

8a) Sept, 15 1981
Dear Yvonne
Hi how are you well

for me fine I like
you and I want you
to go to my house
for Missy's birthday
and you'll be with me
and missy's firends will
be with her including
my cousins one is 11 and
7 I think your my best
friend and Lilly
is but your my 1st
best friend I would
write more but I'm
running out of lines
Your friend
Always Cindy (Ms R, 4)
P.S. Write back

b) Sept. 17, 1981
Dear Cindy
Hi thank you very much for
your letter.   I'm fine to
just like you. I will ask
my mother if I could go
to Missy's birthday party and
if I don't go I will try
and get her a presand and
if I don't get her a
presand or go to her
birthday party then I don't know
what I will do but
I will try very hard
to go. Wall it is time
for sighlent reading so
I have to go now
And love is always
with Yvonne (Ms R, 4)

c) Sept 18 1981,
Dear Yvonne
thanks for the letter. well I
hope you could to to missy's birthday
party. and I promise you you
don't have to be with Missy because
your going to be with me. I hope.
well I have to go now because
were going to have to go to lunch
love always your
best friend Cindy (Ms R, 4)

The correspondence continues with Yvonne writing on September 22nd to express regret at not having been able to attend Missy's (Cindy's younger sister's) birthday party. Although

Cindy and Yvonne's concerns about the birthday party seem to be somewhat different, their ability to sustain a topic over turns is apparent. Each is comfortable using the postal system, and has acquired the ability to write interactively with fluency.

Both (5) and (8) demonstrate Yvonne's ability to write interactively in her corresponding. Another correspondence into which she entered has implications for the effect of the social context in which letter writing takes place upon what children write. Toward the end of the school year, after I interviewed each of the students who had participated in the research project, I wrote and thanked each one for his or her participation. My letter started a correspondence with Yvonne, which is shown in (9).

9a) June 17, 1982
Dear Yvonne
Thanks for coming to talk with
me today. It was a big help,
and fun too.
What are you going to miss most
about Colmar next year? And what
are you going to like best about Suva?
Write back!
Love,
Jennifer

b) 6/21/82
Dear Jennifer
thaks alot for
your letter
remember the
one you rought
me about innerviewing
on me. Well I like
it. To bad we
woun't be able
to do that again
Love
Yvonne (Ms R, 4)

c) June 23, 1982
Dear Yvonne,
  Thanks for the letter.
Yes I do remember the one
I wrote you about our interview.
I'm glad you had a good time.
  How do you feel about the
school year ending? I feel
a little bit sad because I
won't be seeing the friends
I made here this year.
  Please write if you have
time.
Love,
Jennifer

d) 6/24/82
Dear Jennifer
I did like the
inner viewing
it was fun
to bad we
can't do it
again but
I wish I could
Write back soon!
Love
Always
Yvonne (Ms R, 4)

In both of my letters, through my questions, I made an effort to write to Yvonne about what struck me as important personal issues. And in my second letter, I answered my question to her with respect to myself, hoping that by sharing my feelings, I could encourage her to share hers. Yvonne steadfastly resists my efforts, choosing instead to focus on the "inner view." (Her spelling reflects a refreshingly different and appealing notion of what interviewing is, and she is clear enough about her perception of the event that she does not notice the standard spelling in my second letter and correct to it in hers.) Clearly the interview had a big impact on her, and she wants to hold on to it. But her letters do not demonstrate the facitlity at interactive writing seen in her letters to her peers. There is the sense that she is being very careful, in a relationship where she is a little awed. For example, in (9b), when she thanks me for my first letter, she reminds me of what it was about, with the implication that I won't remember without her assistance. While there is no way to be absolutely certain, it seems likely that the stress of interacting with an adult of some importance to her about a momentous event inhibited the rather sophisticated writing facility which Yvonne has demonstrated in more relaxed settings. Unfortunately, there are no other instances of Yvonne responding to an adult to use for comparison. In typical child-adult correspondences, the child initiates, the adult responds, and the interaction stops.

There is another instance of child-adult corresponding worthy of mention here because of its contrast to the situation in (9). Here nothing in the social context interferes, and the adult is able to motivate the child to write interactively. Judith (see Section 3.1, No. (7)) is one of the less mature fourth grade letter writers, and with her peers she does not do any writing that is clearly interactive. However, her teacher is able to help her to move beyond what she typically does with peers. Judith wrote three letters in rapid succession to Ms R which are repetitive expressions of affection. In an effort to give Judith something else to write about, to share more of herself, Ms R wrote to Judith and asked if she had any brothers and sisters, and if so, their names and ages. Judith's response, three weeks later, appears in (10).

10) 11-13
Miss Rose
You are nice
with me Miss
Rose a like one
of your letters and
that was very nice
and in that letter you
tol me wat was the
name of my sisters
and Broders one of
the name of my
broder is Eddiee
and the another Hes
name is jorge
and the big siste
is Rose Mari have
a happy day Miss
Rose
form
Judith

(Again notice the use of 'tell' instead of 'ask.' Also there are interesting evidences of the influence of Spanish in Judith's spelling. 'I' becomes 'a;' in Spanish /a/ is the closest approximation to the English dipthong /ay/. Similarly, 'brothers' becomes 'broders' because /d/ closely approximates the English voiced interdental fricative, 'th' sound which does not occur in Spanish.)

The careful, labored way in which Judith refers to Ms R's letter and what she feels is the main question in it, and then goes on to answer the question, reflect the effort she must exert to respond to the content of Ms R's letter, i.e., to respond interactively. There is the impression that she is stretching here, both in her use of English and in her skill at writing letters, making the most of her teacher's assistance to achieve more than she could have without the incentive. (It is interesting that Judith does not answer Ms R's first question about whether or not she has any brothers or sisters. This may reflect a lack of perspective taking on Judith's part, in that her brothers and sisters are such an integral part of her life that a question about whether or not she has any simply slips by unnoticed.) Again, Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development helps to explain Judith's ability to exceed her usual ability here. What she can do with her teacher's encouragement now, she will be able to do more readily in written interactions later.

The notion that writing can be interactive seems to be one which evolves, as children gain experience using the postal system. Because corresponding, by its very definition, is an interactive process, the act of doing it helps children to move the locus of the interaction from the here and now of the classroom to the more remote content of the writing itself. When correspondents emerge who make demands on their correspondees, the process is hurried along. The facilitator may be an adult, but, as will be seen in Section 3.5, it need not be.

3.5 Karla. Karla is an academically successful second grader in Ms G's class. While her first language is Spanish, she is bilingual, and she writes letters in English unless her recipient is more comfortable with Spanish. Two of Karla's twenty-three letters are in Spanish, and in both of these the greetings and dates are in English. Perhaps Karla writes these before she really begins to think about whom she is writing to. Or, since the closing of one of these letters is in English too, perhaps Karla is simply accustomed to doing these formulaic parts of the letter in English and tailor-makes only the body of her letters for the recipient.

Karla is popular and social, and not just among girls in Ms G's classroom. One day Patricia, a good third grade friend of hers, announced to me in Karla's presence, "She writes to boys." And indeed she does, at least to one. She seems to consider boys to be regular people, which is not entirely usual for girls her age. Karla also writes to older children, two fourth grade girls in Ms R's class, and it is the development of a correspondence with one of these students, Shirley, that is of particular interest here.

It was seen in Section 3.4 that a teacher can help a student to write at a level she has not reached on her own. It appears also that an older child can facilitate the progress of a younger one by modeling more mature writing. It is not that Shirley intentionally plays the role of model, but rather that Karla makes use of what she sees Shirley do, for her own advancement.

In the first pair of letters, written in March, Shirley initiates the correspondence, and Karla responds with a letter of the type discussed in Section 3.2, except for one interesting exception. While the words of Karla's letter do not give any hint that she is responding to Shirley's letter, the thematic relation of the art work in the two letters is unmistakable. To Shirley's picture of two straight-haired girls labeled "you" and "me" playing tetherball, Karla responds with two curly-haired girls labeled "you" and "me" playing tetherball. In Shirley's picture the ball is on "me's" side; in Karla's it is on "you's" side. The written messages in this first pair of letters appear in (1).

1a) March 5-82
Hi Krala
How are you? I am Fine
How are you going in School
are you good? I am. I
thing so. are you geting
better in tethir-ball. I
am. will I have to go
by you'r Frined Shirley (pic)

b) 3-15-82
Dear Shirly
shirly i like you
because you play whith
me love (Karla) (pic)

It may be that Karla assumes Shirley knows she is talking about tetherball, and that Karla is correct in her assumption. Perhaps only an adult researcher looks for such literalness. In the second pair of letters, again initiated by Shirley two months later there are no pictures, and Karla's verbal message is more specific because it has to carry more of the meaning. The second sequence appears in (2).

2a) 5/18 1982
Dear Karla
How are you. I am Fine. How are you
geting in teathball Hope better. are
you Fine is school work. what Book
you in math and in reading well
I have to go by you'r Friend

Shirley
oh say Hi to Elizabeth and Sonia

by agin!

b) Dear shirly I like
you because you

play with me and
we play tether
ball.
love
Karla

Karla's first two letters to Shirley are done in cursive writing, and it may be that her concentration on handwriting interferes with the composing process. She gives the impression of not having noticed most of what Shirley wrote to her, picking up on only the tetherball topic. Or it may simply be that, for an inexperienced letter writer, the many questions in Shirley's letter are simply overwhelming.

Karla's third letter is in marked contrast to the first two. Here she initiates the correspondence, and gives Shirley something to write back about. She is learning about the usefulness of asking questions in her letters. Because they require answers, they motivate the recipient to respond. This third sequence of letters, of which the first was written in early to mid June, appears in (3).

3a) Dear Shirly I
Like you because
you play Chinice
Jump Roap with me
how are you
doing with your
Riding.
Love
Karla

b) Date
June 15-982
Hi Karla
How are you.
I am Fine.
and I like
to play chinice
Jump rope with
you too. and I
am Fine in reading
too. Krala How

old are you. I am
10 year's old. and
I am a 4th grader
by your
Friend
Shirley B.

Once again Karla tells Shirley why she likes her, although this time she focuses on a different activity in which she and Shirley participate together. This time, however, she also asks Shirley how she is doing in a particular school subject, reading. It seems quite likely that Karla has learned from Shirley's letters that such questions are appropriate.

Shirley writes back a model response, in (3b). She performs the ritualistic greeting, asking her addressee how she is, and then answering with respect to herself. She comprehends the intent of Karla's "I like you because you play Chinice Jump Roap with me," and responds appropriately that she likes to play the game with her, too. Shirley knows how to spell "rope" and does so correctly; she apparently does not know how to spell "Chinese" and therefore stays with Karla's spelling. She answers Karla's question about how she is doing in reading, again changing to the standard spelling. Shirley then goes on to ask a new question, to answer it with respect for herself, and then to give some additional information (which Karla presumably already knows). Shirley's letter is definitely not a model of creativity, but a model of how to respond appropriately and sensitively, it surely is.

Shirley does not hear from Karla within a week, so she writes her to find out why. Karla writes back to apologize for not responding sooner, writing interactively for the first time. This represents a major step in the development of her ability to correspond. This final sequence between Karla and Shirley appears in (4).

4a) June-22-1982
Hi Karla
How are you.
I am Fine. How come
you don't wirte back
or the letter that
I sent you has
not got to you.
and How are you
in you math. I'm just
Fine. what book are
you in Math. what
Book are you in
reading. well I have
to go by your Friend
Shirley
P.S. Wirte Back!

b) 6-28-82
Dear Shirly
I am sorry because I dindt
answer you. I didn't have any
time so if you could send
me another letter by now
Frind (pic)
Love Karla

Karla's apology and explanation that she didn't have time constitute an appropriate and sensitive response to Shirley's question (or complaint) about not hearing from her. Karla does not respond to any of Shirley's other questions. She responds directly to the part that may have important social implications for her relationship with Shirley, but she disregards the rest of the letter and asks for another one.

Karla's request for another letter from Shirley reveals an interesting assumption about the rules for corresponding that Karla is operating with. The particular rule at issue pertains to the question of what constitutes a letter in need of a response. Is it simply a matter of turn taking, or might there be something actually written in the letter itself that could motivate a response? Her request in (4b) suggests a feeling on her part the communicative intent of Shirley's earlier letter is somehow cancelled by Karla's failure to respond to it before another one arrived. Both the turn taking sequence and the content of the letters have significance. A letter that she wrote early in the year suggests that her answer at that time focused almost exclusively on the turn taking aspect of corresponding. This letter, written to the principal, appears in (5).

34) Oct 8, 1981
Mr K
Mr K
You are a very nice man.
Please answer me. My
name is Karla (pic)
Love Karla

Here it is the act of writing a letter, i.e., taking a turn, that is supposed to elicit a response. If Karla has any notion that the message in a letter might be deliberately designed so as to require an answer, she demonstrates no awareness of it here. At the same time of year she writes to Susy, a second grade friend in Mrs. F's class, "Yo te mado esta cart para que me quontestes" (I am sending you this letter so that you will answer me.). Again, the message in her letter does not give its recipient anything concrete to answer. What Karla is after early in the year is a return letter. It is the physical presence of the letter, more than its symbolic content, that constitutes its significance. The letter is the concrete manifestation of a turn taken, the signal for the recipient to do his or her part.

By the end of the year, the message in a letter has taken on more importance to Karla. Its physical being is still a major concern, but she has discovered with Shirley's help, that she can interact with a friend through what they write to each other. This is no small revelation, for it makes the writing of friendly letters a useful communicative tool, rather than a largely ceremonious gesture. Certainly Karla has more to learn about corresponding with a friend, but through her experience with with models of writing more mature than her own, she has made important progress.

PART FOUR: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

4.0 Introduction. It is obvious that the postal system at Colmar is not producing great writers instantly. Much of the writing is labored and very limited. And yet, children who would not otherwise be writing are choosing to write letters of their own accord. Clearly something important is going on here. Furthermore, these children are getting the idea that something they might actually want to write is important enough to be a school activity. Certainly this paves the way for positive attitudes toward writing. And children who find pleasure in writing early on are more likely to be willing to work to make their writing good as they get further on in school than children for whom writing has been drudgery from the start. In this final part of the report, I would like to look at what using the postal system may be contributing to children's writing development. The postal system at Colmar, as it is currently used by teachers, has its limitations, but I think it is providing students with extremely valuable writing experience.

4.1 The Notion of Text Ownership. When I set out to study interactive writing, I had no idea how little of it I would find. And yet when I reflect on my own experience with corresponding with friends, I notice that not a great deal of that writing is interactive either. Certainly part of it is, but the turn taking aspect of corresponding is important with adults, too. The big difference I notice between my experience with corresponding and what I found in children's letters at Colmar has to do with what I have best heard referred to as text ownership (Farr, 1983). Experienced writers have a certain sense of command over their writing which is very clearly missing in inexperienced writers. I once watched Lawrence, a second grader in Ms G's classroom, laboriously write to his sister, April, the following: "I see you play with Laura at my house." After finishing that letter, he still had a little time, so he decided to write a letter to Laura, his sister's friend. This is the content of his letter to Laura: "I see you play with April at my house." The messages are identical, except for the change of names. This to me represents the epitome of a lack of text ownership, reusing the same message because of the supreme effort involved in thinking it up and getting it down on paper. What is perhaps most remarkable about the use of the postal system among some of the children at Colmar is their willingness to struggle to get something written to send to a friend or an important adult. They want to send and receive letters.

There are several instances where children play, either with language or with the rules of letter writing form, and these instances seem to convey a growing sense of text ownership. For instance, Becky (Mrs. F, 2), who wrote so many affirmations of friendship during the year, on one occasion wrote to Wendy (Mrs. F, 3), "I love you You are nice and I like you. You yourself and you." The "you yourself and you" inserted in the picture box conveyed to me the message that Becky was feeling a sense of power over the medium. Similarly, on a letter which Miguel (Ms R, 4) wrote to John (Ms R, 4) about the Tommy Hearns-Sugar Ray Leonard boxing match, the address on the front was "From: Miguel going for Tommy Hearns," and "To: John going for tommy." Miguel, too, seemed to be feeling powerful, in charge of his medium. In contrast to inexperienced writers like Lawrence, when more experienced writers write several letters at one sitting, each one is different, tailor-made for the recipient. These writers make the medium work for them, rather than feeling controlled by it.

4.2 Notes on Development. The design of the project, without a control group, makes it impossible to attribute the cause of development in children's writing to use of the postal system. However, examples such as No. 10 in Section 3.4, where Ms R encourages Judith to struggle with interactive writing, and the story of Karla and Shirley in Section 3.5 certainly point to a particular kind of growth directly attributable to use of the postal system. Since there are no other occasions for interactive writing in the writing curriculum, it is only logical to assume that the development is taking place within the context of the postal system.

There is another type of situation in which use of the postal system may not be the cause of development, but it may be a vehicle for revealing development. One particular child comes to mind. Susy began the school year fluent only in Spanish. She was a newcomer to the school,and, quick to make friends, she soon found writing letters a good facilitator of the process. Early in the year she wrote several letters like (1).

1) 10-81
estimada Roselia yo te quiero
mucho vas a mi casa aora cuando
igamos de la escuela aora
tu amiga susy

(dear Roselia I love you
very much go to my house now when
we leave school now
your friend susy (Mrs. F, 2)

Since making friends was on her mind, it comes as no surprise that her letter would contain an affirmation of friendship and an invitation. During the first half of the year, Susy's letters, all in Spanish, grew from just a few lines to double or triple that length. Then, on her own initiative, she started writing in English, and her letters became short again for a while. By the end of the year she was inspired to write the letter in (2). The occasion was the death of her friend's brother in an automobile accident.

2) 6-82
Dear Delfina
I like you If I cut (could)
go to your hous
Il gook (cook?) Delfina.
To see your mam
I Love your mam.
she is prette.
You ar cut (cute) to Delfina
ar you Wendy's Frend
yes-or-no ansser
me Ples I houp
you fill bette and
your mam to
I love you Delfina
Love Sus
Your fend Susy (Mrs. F, 2)

Certainly there is much that could be said about Susy's spelling, and in one place it is not precisely clear what she meant, but it appears that she has written a letter of condolence, the basic content of which many adults would have difficulty improving. In aid of condoling Delfina and her mother, Susy offers to help them (to cook), tells them she loves them, compliments them, and tells them she hopes they feel better. She also takes care of a little business ("are you Wendy's frend yes-or-no"), as if to remind Delfina that life is still going on, waiting for her to return.

While using the postal system cannot be said to have caused the development of either Susy's English language proficiency or her writing, the fact that she enjoyed writing letters and did it frequently could only be to her advantage. The postal system provided a supportive environment in which her writing development could flourish.

4.3 Conclusion. It has been my intention throughout to let the Colmar students, themselves, reveal how use of the postal system enters into their lives. They are not learning editing skills in this process, but they are learning that writing is fun and rewarding. They are developing fluency and developing skill at a particular kind of writing that will be useful for the rest of their lives.

There is another advantage to the postal system at Colmar that is extremely significant, given the state of American education today. Many teachers feel unsure of their own writing abilities, and shy away from putting themselves in the position of evaluating their students' writing. Many other teachers simply feel overwhelmed at the amount of paper work they have to do. A postal system such as this one creates a situation in which the students do a lot of writing with a minimum of responsibility on their teacher's parts. Teachers need to create a context in which the writing can happen, and then, simply let it happen. It is reassuring to know that something that is fun is also good for the people involved.

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